

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
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Price 5 Cents.

JACK WRIGHT AND HIS ELECTRIC DEERS; OR, FIGHTING THE BANDITS OF THE BLACK HILLS.

By NONAME.



• Shot after shot was fired at the outlaws, driving them back, but several rocks were sent flying at the wire cages with fearful force.

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JACK WRIGHT AND HIS ELECTRIC DEERS;

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CHAPTER I.

RACING A LOCOMOTIVE.

The shadows of twilight were falling upon the beautiful village of Wrightstown, when a tremendous cheer burst from the throats of all the grown inhabitants of the place, who were thronged along the main street.

Hats and handkerchiefs were waved by excited men, women and children, gay bunting decorated all the buildings, and eager glances were turned up the thoroughfare expectantly.

Every one seemed to be cast into a fever of intense suspense, kept up a constant buzz of conversation, and cheer after cheer ran along the line on either side of the street.

The cause of all this excitement came dashing into view.

It was an odd-looking wagon, built of aluminum, a metal lighter and stronger than steel, drawn by four mechanical deers of the same material, worked by electro-motive force.

The rear compartment of the wagon was a bullet-proof wire cage with a door at the back, a railing on top, and a powerful searchlight; adjoining it was a metal turret with a railed platform on each side and a wire lookout cage on top, the interior divided into two floors; and in front was another wire cage with a second searchlight and railing and a front platform.

A flag-pole on it flaunted the name of the Avalanche; within the front cage there was a wheel for steering the mechanical deers, and beneath the floor was a stowage compartment for a large number of electrical accumulator jars, from which the power was derived.

The four big deers drawing the wagon had been given a ~~like~~ mechanical power and movement of the legs by a most ingenious contrivance hidden from view within their bodies, and were held in an upright position by three shafts attached to the wagon.

Steel reins and harness were upon their bodies, the former running back into the wagon, where they were secured to the wheel and thus governed to steer the machine much in the same manner a horse is steered, although, in this case, a strong leverage was necessary in order to turn them so they would swing the shafts, and thus turn the wagon.

A fine-looking, athletic boy stood managing this wheel, his dark eyes flashing with pride over the success of his invention, as this was its trial trip and every one had turned out to witness it.

Jack Wright was the boy's name, and he was reported to be the most marvelous inventor of peculiar devices for submarine, aerial and terrestrial navigation and locomotion in the world.

The boy inventor had become celebrated some time before by his other inventions, by the use of which he had made himself very rich, and thus able to lavish large sums at carrying out the different inventions that he had contrived.

He lived in the finest house in the town and had a big workshop at the back of his grounds, where his ideas were evolved.

Upon the top of each cage stood two friends, who lived at his house, and had always accompanied him on his various journeys—one, an old sailor, with a wooden leg, sandy beard and glass eye, named Tim Topstay, and the other, a short, fat Dutch boy, a little older than Jack and of a "fighty" disposition, named Fritz Schneider.

They were both waving flags to the multitude below, and yelling themselves hoarse as the deers sped along under Jack's management.

On the front platform there stood another individual, named Peleg Hopkins, who had come up from New York to join the boy inventor on his trial trip of the electric deers.

He was a long, lean, lanky man, clad in clerical black, wore a stovepipe and had a thin, smooth face, and a long red nose.

Hopkins had frequently gone with the boy on his adventurous trips, was a great scientist, linguist, fossil-gatherer, and represented several noted societies, in whose interests he worked.

He was shouting to the people to get out of the way, and Jack sent his peculiar four-in-hand speeding faster by turning one of the levers on a board fastened to the top of a compass binnacle in front of him.

There were a number of insulated copper wires running from the brass discs on the switch-board down to the batteries below the floor, while other wires ran from the jars out through the hollow shafts to the complicated machinery within the deers.

By the management of these levers the boy could walk or run the deers ahead, back them or bring them to a pause.

He now had them going at a moderate rate of speed, and his keen glance was kept fixed steadily ahead as he moved the wheel to hold his flying four-in-hand straight in the middle of the road.

Within a few minutes the suburbs of the village was reached, and, with an intense sigh of relief, the boy exclaimed, in happy tones:

"By Jove! professor, the machine works like a charm!"

"I see she does," replied Hopkins; "and I'm delighted with her."

"Had she proven a failure, after all the hard work, big expense, and enormous planning spent on her since we returned from my last trip, the disappointment would have been awful to me."

"I have no doubt," said Hopkins, with a nod; "but I have never known you to fail. You make your first calculations too carefully to do so. Ah! here we are out of the village now."

"Then I'll put on full speed and see what she can do. I have reckoned on seventy-five miles an hour if pressed for speed."

"'Pon my word, it don't seem possible."

"You'll see. Wait, I'll call Tim and Fritz down. Hey, Tim!"

"Aye, aye, my hearty!" came a gruff response from above. "Come down here and keep your eye on the batteries."

"In one minute, my lad!"

There was a trap door in the roof of the central turret, through which the old sailor passed, when he found himself in a fair-sized room, which was utilized for sleeping purposes, and lighted by round, screened windows.

Descending a staircase he next arrived in the room below which was used as a cooking and dining-room, the walls being ornamented with various kinds of weapons, and the closets for containing water, provisions, and stores of various kinds.

There were doors and windows opening on either side from here, and doors leading into the front and back cages.

Passing through the central one, Tim stumped into the front cage, taking a chew of navy plug as he went and joined Jack.

While he was lifting the floor trap to see if the batteries were all right the boy shouted to Fritz to come down and watch the batteries under the floor in the back compartment.

"I couldn't vhas do it!" the Dutch boy answered.

"Why can't you?" shouted Jack, in surprise.

"Donner vetter!" came the doleful reply, "dot wooden-legged olt rooster vhas proke me mine het mit his slack-pole evidently by purpose, und I don't vhas been able to see der back of mine neck alrety."

"Tim," said Jack, reprovingly, to the old sailor, "what have you been doing?"

"Dash my toplights, if I've a-been doin' anything!" innocently lied Tim, who was an atrocious yarn spinner, and delighted in playing practical jokes on Fritz every time the Dutch boy played one on him.

"Come now—own up!" exclaimed Jack. "Have you hurt him?"

"Lor' save yer, no!" modestly replied Tim, with a grin. "Yer see, it wuz a accident. Him an' me wuz a-wavin' our flags from port to leeward, when out o' my hand flew mine, an' fouled him in ther jawin' tackle. I reckon as it made him see stars, but it wuzn't done a-purpose, an' he'll get over his confusion in a few minutes."

Just then Fritz went down through a trap in the roof into the rear cage, bellowing for an axe to even matters up with Tim.

"Stay where you are and stop your fooling!" shouted Jack. "I see a train coming from the station at Wrightstown, and I am going to race it a couple of miles as the track runs along parallel with this road a few yards distant."

With this injunction Fritz had to swallow his anger and obey.

Besides being a fine cool the Dutch boy was an expert electrician, and knew that Jack depended upon him to attend to his duty.

Through the dusky twilight came the express from Wrightstown, like a monster serpent, its headlight streaming out on the polished rails, its car windows glowing crimson with light, and the engineer, passengers, conductors, and brakemen all peering out at the deers.

Jack started the searchlight at the front and rear, and the mellow electric lights in both cages and turret, while the eyes of the four deers being illumined inside with reflecting lights, glared like balls of fire.

The road ahead was smooth, clear and hard.

As soon as the rushing train came even with the deers Jack turned the lever further around, increasing speed till he ran even with the train, upon observing which the people on her, who had all heard of the boy inventor, uttered a wild cheer.

They saw that he designed to race the train.

The engineer was game, and blowing a defiant blast on his whistle he moved his throttle and increased speed.

Away they both dashed, pell-mell, the exciting race fairly begun.

Thick clouds of smoke poured from the smokestack of the locomotive, steam hissed from the valves, the pistons throbbed and the wheels rumbled like thunder, while the passengers waved hands, hats and handkerchiefs out the windows, and shouted their defiance.

Away sprang the deers like wild fire, their graceful legs moving with lightning-like rapidity, bright electric sparks flying out at the joints of the leg connecting rods, at the wheel hubs, and streaks of flame snapping from the great antlers, while from beneath the rattling, flat-cogged wheels clouds of dirt and dust flew up behind the wagon.

On, on they tore, through the dusky twilight, the Avalanche bathed in the mellow electric glow, and its powerful searchlights sending out two jets of dazzling whiteness that showed everything up as plain as the sunlight.

CHAPTER II.

A FOUL CRIME.

"Great heavens, professor, there are two men fighting on the railroad track, and if they don't get out of the way they'll get killed!" exclaimed Jack.

He pointed ahead where the beams of the powerful searchlight shot a mile ahead, revealing the two men outlined in its dazzling rays.

"And he wanted you to get the paper, secure the gold and share it with his family. But I don't see how you are going to do it."

"To all of which I assented," replied Jack, quietly.

"Ah! you have some object in view, now, haven't you?"

"Professor, I want to find use for my new invention, and I have already been talking to Tim and Fritz about taking a pleasure trip in her to Dakota, as I am anxious to visit the Black Hills. Now if I should happen to be near Deadwood, where Tom King is very likely well known, what would be more likely than for me to get on his trail there and make him disgorge, and put him under arrest for this murder."

"Sure enough, you're a shrewd calculator, Jack."

Just then the deers ran into the village again, and as the spectators saw the corpse within the cage in the glare of the electric lights, their joyful demonstrations became hushed and they began to flock after the Avalanche to find out who got killed.

The news spread like wildfire that there was a dead man aboard of her, and every one they passed cast eager, questioning glances at the body to see if they could recognize who it was.

In this manner the Avalanche had drawn up in front of the magistrate's house, and came to a pause, when there suddenly sounded a piercing shriek from a woman standing among the spectators, and in frenzied accents she cried:

"My husband! Oh, my husband!" and then fainted.

"Who is that woman?" asked Jack, glancing at her.

"My mother," replied a pale young girl who bent over her.

"And is this the body of your father?"

"Yes," the girl admitted.

While some officers carried the corpse inside, Jack questioned the girl, while some kindly neighbors took her mother into their house.

The boy then stated the facts to the police, and boarding the Avalanche he started the deers homeward, remarking:

"Professor, by to-morrow we will get at the details of the murdered man's life, and perhaps we may not only capture his assassin and recover that stolen paper, but we may find the Lost Gold Mine by taking a trip to the Black Hills."

"If you should go, count upon my company, too, then," said Hopkins, eagerly.

A few minutes afterward the deers ran into Jack's yard and passed through it into his spacious workshop.

CHAPTER III.

OFF FOR THE BLACK HILLS.

On the following morning Jack left his house and made his way to a small cottage on the suburbs of Wrightstown.

It was here Mrs. Fleetwood, the widow of the murdered man, lived with her son and daughter, and in answer to Jack's knock for admittance the girl came to the door and greeted him cordially.

He passed into a cozy parlor where he met the widow, and at once launched into the subject of his call by saying:

"I told your daughter last night all that transpired between your husband and myself at the railroad track, and you have all the particulars about the murder. Now I want to know something of your husband's career in Dakota, for if I find that there is any good reason for interesting myself in the matter, I may start for the Black Hills, and not only try to bring your husband's assassin to justice, but I will make an effort to find his claim, the Lost Gold Mine."

"Oh, Mr. Wright, you are so kind!" gratefully replied the widow. "I will tell you all I know about the matter. I loved

poor Dick dearly and it would satiate my craving for vengeance to know that his murderer was brought to justice. And as for the gold mine—if it can be recovered, I would be glad to share the claim with you, as Dick offered ere he died."

"Proceed with your story," said the boy.

"Well, about two years ago, my husband went to Dakota to work for a mine owner, and I and our two children have since been subsisting upon the wages earned by my son, who works in the village. A month ago my husband wrote me that he had accidentally found the lost mine, and assured me that our future wealth was undoubted. He had left his employer and gone prospecting for himself. He wrote he was afraid to stake his claim for fear of being murdered, as he had an enemy who was anxious to lay claim to the mine, or lead—"

"You refer to Tom King?"

"Exactly. That man, my husband wrote, was not only the chief of gamblers at Deadwood, but was also the head of the most noted and successful bandits of the Black Hills. This rascal hounded poor Dick everywhere, and persecuted him persistently to learn his secret. My husband soon became so terrified that he resolved to come eastward to escape him and secure capital to work his claim. He did so, accordingly, and after a two years' absence we were expecting him home last night. The train he came on evidently stopped at D—, as it went no further, and impatient to get home he probably did not wait for the next through train, but attempted to walk the three miles distance when King, who must have been shadowing him, pursued and finally attacked him in the manner you witnessed."

This theory seemed plausible to Jack.

He pondered a moment and then asked:

"Do you know where the Lost Gold Mine is located?"

"Not precisely," answered Mrs. Fleetwood, "but according to a letter Dick wrote me it was near Bear Gulch, on Custer's Peak. He also mentioned that the reason the mine was never found before was because it was within a vast, natural cavern under the mountain."

The boy questioned the widow at some length further, and finally took his departure and returned home.

Making his way back to the workshop, where Tim and Fritz were busily employed at the Avalanche, making some slight corrections in the gear, which he had found necessary after the trial trip, he imparted the news he had gleaned to them.

"It is evident to me that Dick Fleetwood really found the Lost Gold Mine," said the boy, earnestly. "and I think we might get the best of Tom King by rapid action. The rascal will undoubtedly go straight back to the Black Hills, and lose no time locating the mine and staking his claim to it. If Dick Fleetwood had not been a consummate coward he would have staked his claim and once it was registered no one could have laid a finger on it even if they had killed him."

"Vot you vhas wanted to do vonct den?" queried Fritz.

"Start off in pursuit of the murderer."

"An' take ther Avalanche?" queried Tim.

"Of course. The machine is portable and can be taken apart in a few hours, packed away in cases, and we could ship it on the same train we take from Wrightstown."

"Den you vhas go to-day?"

"In two days," the boy exclaimed.

"That settles it—we goes!" said Tim.

"Good! Then take the machine apart, boys, and I will attend to arranging our business and outfits, so that by Thursday we can leave Wrightstown."

His friends complied and Jack went out.

He met the professor in the house, racing around like a lunatic, with a little red monkey perched on his shoulder.

pulling his hair with might and main, and yelling like a fiend.

The beast was Tim's pet, was called Whiskers, and had been found in Africa when Jack went there in his first submarine boat some time before.

"Murder!" the professor was shrieking. "Take it off! Oh—help—help—help! The confounded beast is tearing my head off!"

Jack could not refrain from laughing at the professor, but he managed to drive the monkey away.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Why did the little rascal attack you?"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Hopkins, "he has pulled nearly all the hair out of my head! The brute lay in a chair asleep, and, as I did not see him there, I sat down upon him and he went for me."

As soon as the panting professor's excitement subsided, Jack told him what they intended to do.

He expressed an eager desire to accompany the expedition, and in conclusion drew a newspaper from his pocket, and said:

"I've almost forgotten to tell you of a piece of news I just read in this morning's paper. See here; read that."

He handed the paper to Jack, pointing at an item couched as follows:

"Bandits of the Black Hills.

"From Rapid City to Deadwood the country for some time past has been terrorized by a well-organized gang of outlaws whose atrocities have known no limit, under the skillful management of a scoundrel known as the gambler prince, Tom King.

"This gang, numbering over one hundred ruffians from all parts of the continent, is well mounted, fully armed with the latest improved weapons, and has bid defiance alike to the soldiery from the reservations, the police of the cities, and vigilantes of the towns.

"All their marauding expeditions succeed, and include raids on towns, stealing cattle, holding up wagons, travelers and trains, and the reckless sacrifice of any human life opposed to their depredations.

"Secure in their mountain retreat, these scoundrels are holding a reign of terror over the surrounding communities, defying law and order, and despite a reward of \$5,000 for the extermination of the band, and the most violent and persistent efforts of the citizens and authorities, nothing has yet been done to end their outrages."

Jack uttered a prolonged whistle as he laid the paper down.

"Hopkins," said he, "I am afraid we are going to stir up a hornet's nest. All our future work tends toward fighting these bandits, in order to carry out the work I have engaged to do."

"I guess we had better not go," timidly suggested the professor.

"Nonsense! I am not weakened by this newspaper report," the boy replied. "If such a rascally band exists, nothing would give me greater pleasure than tackling them and earning that reward. Such vipers have no right to exist unmolested, and if once I get the electric deers among them, they will find that they have a tougher customer to deal with than any they have yet met."

Hopkins had every confidence in Jack's ability and the virility of the Avalanche, so he demurred no further when he found that the boy was determined to make the venture.

"Dear me!" he remarked, plaintively. "I dread it, but I'll get ready and go with you. The location will offer me a fund of research into the geology and prehistoric mammals of that

region, and that is inducement enough for any man to risk his life."

He was very ardent over his scientific work, and picking up his stovepipe hat from the table to go upstairs and pack his trunk, a parrot popped out of it and suddenly bit his finger.

"Whoop!" yelled the professor, in agonized tones, as he sprang in the air. "What in thunder is this? Oh, great Juno—it's Bismarck!"

He gave the bird a punch, causing it to relax its grip, utter a grating scream, and fly across the room shrieking:

"Chase yourself! Poor polly! Rats, you tarrier, rats!"

Sucking his finger and glaring balefully at the parrot, Hopkins pranced out of the room, growling a threat against Fritz's pet.

The bird had been found in Africa at the same time the monkey was captured.

Jack roared with laughter.

He had no time to waste, however, so he began to work, and by four o'clock everything was in readiness.

The deers and the wagon were dissected and packed, with all the appointments and necessities, and the cases and baggage were carted to the railroad depot.

In two days our friends boarded the train, carrying the parrot and monkey with them, and left Wrightstown.

Away they were whirled on their long journey over the continent, and without any mishap they finally passed through Nebraska, went up through Fall River, Custer and Pennington counties, where they paused at Rapid City, from which point it was decided to make their start.

On the following day they had their effects carted to an isolated spot on the outskirts, where the cases were unpacked and the machine was readjusted.

When this was done everything was stowed away inside, and having assured himself that everything was in perfect order, Jack returned to the town to procure some provisions and other necessities.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO MEN IN CORDUROY.

The shadows of a dark evening lengthened over the city when Jack finished loading a wagon he had procured, and sent it out to the Avalanche.

He then stopped at a drug store, and purchasing a small case of medicines he proceeded after the wagon, and reaching the outskirts of the town, he pursued a lonely country road flanked by very few houses.

A small drinking saloon with dim lights stood beside the road, and as he drew near it he saw two men standing on the piazza loudly talking and laughing, with their backs turned toward him.

Both were dressed in dark corduroy suits and caps, and smoked cigars, carried riding whips, and were tall, athletic fellows.

"Really!" one was laughing. "Greatest joke of the season, Bob."

"How did you work it?" queried the other.

"The result of accident. When I alighted from the train up steps a constable. 'Want you!' says he. With that I ran, he after me. Dodged into a barn. Out comes a farmer in long ulster. I grabs him—struggled—but he had to give me his hat and ulster, for I knocked him silly and swapped."

"Well?" queried the other.

"Restrain yourself. Out I walks, togged in the farmer's rig, and false beard. Up comes constable. I nearly laughed in his face as I yelled that there was a thief in my barn."

'Get help,' says he as he hurries in. I goes and the beggar arrests the farmer. Ha! ha! ha! I was delayed, though, by being obliged to hide from the authorities."

"Clever!" chuckled the other.

"Knew I'd find you at this joint," said the reciter. "Wasn't mistaken, either, as these garments and the horses I telegraphed you to have ready, attest. I'm strapped, though, Bob."

"And so am I. We will need money ere we reach the hills."

Just then the sound of Jack's footsteps smote their ears, and both looked around at him and exchanged significant glances.

As the boy came abreast of them he was calculating that they were a pair of rogues despite their nobby outfits, and he realized that the saloon people must be their friends, or they would not have spoken so publicly about the escape of one from a constable.

It was now too gloomy to see their faces distinctly, as they kept them carefully averted from the light when they saw him coming.

The narrator stepped down from the piazza in front of Jack.

"I say—know what time it is, stranger?" he asked.

"Wait and I'll see," replied Jack.

He withdrew what looked like a massive gold watch from his vest-pocket and the man in corduroy reached out his hand.

"Let me see for myself," he remarked, coolly.

"What!" exclaimed the boy, recoiling.

"Want that watch."

"For keeps?"

"Of course!"

There came a gleam in the man's hand from a revolver, and Jack saw that its muzzle was aimed squarely at his head.

"You are a thief, then?" he asked, curiously.

"You draw it strong! See my pistol? It means fork over."

"Here—take it!" replied Jack, smilingly.

The highwayman grasped the golden case, when there came a brilliant flash from a short barrel attached to it, protruding between Jack's fingers, where it was hidden, a sudden report followed, and the gentleman in corduroy reeled back with a bullet in his hand.

It was not until then that he realized that Jack shot him with a French cylinder revolver, looking like a watch, and discharged by pressing a spring in the gilt case.

He uttered a cry of pain, and ripped out a volley of enraged expletives, and his companion ran down from the piazza to his side.

"You've nearly blown my hand off!" he exclaimed.

"Don't make so free with other people's valuables, then!" advised Jack.

"I'll get square, confound you!"

"Go ahead," coolly replied Jack. "I ain't running away.

Just then the dull glow of a lamp in the saloon window slanted out upon the man's face, and Jack saw that he was a handsome, dashing-looking fellow, with dark hair and eyes and a curling, black mustache.

The boy had dimly distinguished his features before, somewhere.

But now he saw them distinctly.

A cry of surprise escaped his lips.

"Tom King!" he exclaimed, remembering the looks of Fleetwood's murderer.

"He knows me!" gasped the wounded man, in startled tones.

"Murderer of Dick Fleetwood!" continued Jack forcibly.

"By heaven's I'm exposed," hoarsely cried the bandit.

These remarks, uttered while the man was in pain, off his guard, confirmed Jack's suspicions of him.

At the time of the crime the boy had only caught a momentary glimpse of the assassin; but the serious event stamp-

ed the gambler-outlaw's image indelibly upon the young inventor's mind.

Now he was sure of his man.

King's face was never to be forgotten in future.

Jack sprang toward him, and catching him by the throat with one hand, he pressed the cold muzzle of his French revolver at his temple.

"Tom King!" hissed the boy, "hand me the diagram you stole from Fleetwood, or I'll blow your brains out!"

"Know about that, too?" groaned the rascal in dismay.

"Of course. Now pay attention!"

"Well?"

"Send your friend back to the piazza."

"Bob, obey him. He's got the drop on me."

The gambler's friend reluctantly complied, but he was itching to bury a knife he carried in Jack's back.

"Now, drop your pistol, King!" ordered the audacious boy.

"I won't use it——"

"Quick!"

Down dropped the weapon.

"What next?" growled the gambler, sulkily.

"Recollect that with one touch of this spring, you die."

"Can't forget it nohow."

"Treachery signals your doom!"

"Let up."

"First hand me the stolen diagram."

"I've memorized its contents."

"Oh, that makes no difference. You can't beat me."

"Try, anyhow, soon's I get away, young fellow. Here it is."

He withdrew a folded paper from his pocket and proffered it to Jack.

"Open it out so I can see if it's right," said the boy.

"Here you are."

A glance showed Jack it was the right one, and he took it and put it in his pocket.

"I didn't expect to gain the mastery of you so soon," said Jack.

"Gained your point, haven't you? Then let me go!" growled King.

"Not much! You are going to jail."

"What!" ejaculated the rascal, with a violent start.

"And swing for murdering Fleetwood!" grimly asserted Jack.

"Heaven and earth! Don't mean it, do you?"

"Well, now, you just trot back to town ahead of me, and you'll see I mean business! If you attempt to bolt I'll riddle you! Move along now—quick!"

"Bob, shoot the cuss!" yelled King, as he strode ahead.

A shot came from the piazza and struck Jack in the back.

He did not fall, however, but uttered a contemptuous laugh.

"Aim for my brain next time," he exclaimed. "I wear a vest of bullet-proof chain mail. Take that for your pains."

He turned and fired at Bob on the piazza, when, with two leaps, King reached a stone wall and leaped over.

The shot grazed Bob's head, and he dashed into the saloon and Jack turned around just in time to see King disappear over the wall.

Firing an ill-aimed shot after the gambler, he missed him.

The boy made a rush for the wall, but just then the doors of the saloon flew open with a crash and out rushed half a dozen hard-looking characters, headed by Bob, armed to the teeth.

"Back with you!" yelled one of them.

A moment afterwards every weapon was aimed at Jack, who sprang behind a tree just as they were fired.

The bullets hummed around him in dangerous proximity, but he was amply protected and fired several shots back in rapid succession, striking and wounding two of his assailants.

Retreating within the saloon, the rest opened fire on Jack from the windows and kept their bodies well screened.

It was useless to fire back, as the boy knew he could not hit them, and he waited for an effective shot.

Presently he heard the pounding of horses' hoofs, and glancing to the right saw King and his friend escaping on horseback.

Both were out of range of his pistol and going fast.

"Confound them!" muttered the chagrined boy. "They have got their pals in this saloon to hold me at bay while they escape. But I'll run them down yet. If it costs me my life I'll make a dash to reach the Avalanche and pursue them."

With this grim determination he fired a volley at the saloon, then broke from cover and ran down the road at full speed.

He had barely gone a dozen paces when an answering volley was fired after his flying figure by the men in the saloon.

CHAPTER V.

THE STOLEN PAPER

Several of the flying bullets struck Jack in the back, without doing him any damage, and several of them grazed the unprotected parts of his body, stingingly.

By the greatest of good fortune, however, he escaped being badly wounded, and dodging among some trees bordering the road he disappeared from the view of the men in the saloon.

In this manner he got safely out of their range, and hastening onward by a circuitous route, he finally reached the Avalanche.

The wagon had been there with the provisions and gone again.

"Ahoy, lad, wot's amiss?" cried Tim, who stood out on the front platform.

"I've just had a run-in with no less a personage than Tom King!" panted the breathless boy, "and after wresting from him the paper he stole from poor Fleetwood, he set a gang of heelers on me who made an effort to knock me cold."

"Vot—King!" cried Fritz, coming out just then.

"Yes, and he has just made his escape."

"Did they injure you?" cried Hopkins, from the cage.

"Came near turning me over, but I'm only scratched."

"Whar are ther lubbers?" demanded Tim.

"Escaped on horseback. King has a friend with him."

"Donner und blitzen! Maybe ve vhas been aple to catch 'em?"

"Might," assented Jack, boarding the wagon.

"Everything aboard but water now," said Hopkins.

"Well, we ean get that anywhere. Let us pursue the outlaws."

He handed Hopkins the medicine as he entered the cage, and as everything was in working order, he seized the steering wheel, and, turning a lever, put the batteries in operation.

The legs of the deers began to move, and they ran out on the open plain, and were steered for the trail of the fugitives.

By the time Jack struck it his men were out of sight, but the marks of the horses' hoofs were so plain when the searchlight was started it was easy to follow them.

Then away raced the deers over the prairie to the northwest, the dust and gravel flying up from their heels and at the rims of the broad, cogged wheels in showers.

The electric lights were blazing in all parts of the wagon, and fiery streams poured from the eyes of the deers ahead on the trail.

Jack put Fritz on the lookout, and Tim in charge of the wheel.

Then he withdrew Fleetwood's diagram from his pocket.

"We can now find out exactly where we want to go," said the boy, as he opened out the paper.

It was a folded sheet of legal cap, and at the top of it was written, in a clear, bold hand:

"To whom it may concern: As my life is threatened by enemies, and it is my duty to provide against it, for my wife and children, I write this explanation to guard against the danger mentioned. I have located the Lost Gold Mine of Bear's Gulch, in Custer's Peak, South Dakota, and should I die ere selling my claim to it, I pray that this document be forwarded to my beloved wife, Helen Fleetwood, of Wrightstown, to do with it as she sees fit. The claim is located at the west end of the canyon at Bear's Gulch, in the face of the cliff on the north side, an entrance to which is gained by passing through a big fissure. Within the cavern, the wonderful lead begins, and can be easily found by any one. The following drawing will explain the situation accurately, and should it never be my fortune to work the mines, it is my wish to have my wife or her agent stake the claim, as I feared to do so on account of the danger to my life arising from it.

"DICK FLEETWOOD."

Appended to this writing there was a rude map by which a child could have found the spot indicated.

As soon as Jack had read the explanation aloud he said:

"Fleetwood must have had good reason for failing to stake the claim when he was in Custer's Peak, for the mere fact of so doing would not have endangered his title to the mine. Yes, I am sure there was something behind this that he does not mention here—some strong reason for his not having registered his claim. We may find out what it was later on."

"Just my opinion," coincided Hopkins, "and as long as King knows the secret, he will lose no time at registering his own claim to it if he gets to Bear Gulch ahead of us."

"It shall be our business to beat him there, then," said Jack, "and unless some unforeseen accident occurs we will do so."

"How far is it in a bee-line from Rapid City to Bear Guleh?"

"About seventy-five miles," replied Jack.

"Then we ought to get there to-night."

"If nothing prevents we will reach the town ere daybreak," replied Jack. "It's got one hundred population, and, I presume, is as hard a crowd of citizens as any in this region."

Just then Fritz interposed with:

"Och, I tink me dot drail vhos gotten fresher alretty."

"How fast are we going, Tim?"

"Thirty knots a hour, my lad."

"But see where they are leading," said Hopkins.

He pointed ahead at a rocky country where the deers could not follow at very great speed, as they would have to be steered out of the way of the obstructions frequently.

Jack looked disgusted.

"They calculated on pursuit," said the boy, "and did this to cover their trail, as the roadbed here is getting as hard as flint."

"Suppose that we let them go," suggested the professor with a frown, "and assure ourselves of reaching Bear Gulch ahead of them—what say you?"

"Very well. We are bound to meet those rascals again."

Acting upon this idea, Tim kept away from the rough ground, and finally struck a mail-coach road.

Judging by its direction, our friends concluded that it ran along Elder Creek, from Black Hawk toward Brownsville.

Jack told the old sailor to follow this road.

It soon afterward began to rain.

They rolled on through the down-pouring torrents half an hour longer, and the search-light lit up the road as if by daylight.

Jack had resumed the wheel, and the rest were inside having their supper, when suddenly there sounded a distant gunshot.

The boy started and listened intently.

It came from ahead, and therefore concluded that it was fired on the road somewhere not far distant.

Almost immediately afterward there sounded the hum of many voices in loud altercation in the midst of a woods, through which the road ran, and the boy shut off the electric lights.

"There's trouble going on around that bend!" he exclaimed, as his friends ran out, startled at being left in darkness.

"I thought as I heerd a pistol shot," said Tim.

"Very likely. Don't you hear those voices now?"

He brought the deers to a pause for a moment.

Now every sound was distinct.

"Han's up thar, pilgrims!" they heard a gruff voice yell in threatening tones. "'Twon't do ter no obligate, nohow, for I've shot down ther leadin' hoss, an' goldurn my pesky skin if I don't call in my boys ter settle with ther hull crew o' ye if ye don't mind wot I'm elucidatin' to yer."

"This is an infernal outrage!" blustered a man's voice.

"Great catamounts, pilgrim, wot's wurth ther most—your hide or them ere wallybles wot yer're got in yer clothes? I reckon as ye kin see as thar's forty rifle bar'l's a-squintin' at ye out o' ther bushes borderin' ther road, an' every flabbergasted one on 'em barks like a coyote. Say, Terry McNulty, drop them 'ere reins, an' up wi' yer han's along with the rest o' these feller citizens. I've got ther drop on ye, an' stage driver or not, we don't want no monkey shines from you."

"Be heavens, it's not ther likes av me ter disobey a gentleman wid a mask on his gob an' a foine pishtol in his grip," sullenly replied the stage-coach driver, "but bad cess to me sowl if I don't be afther wishin' I could swap places wid yer honor this blessed minnit, an' blow yer whiskers off."

"Road agents!" exclaimed Jack.

Every one was startled.

"Dey vhas got der trop on dem vellers too," replied Fritz.

The professor turned pale and shuddered.

"Dear me!" he gasped in affright. "Let us turn back."

Tim came out with several rifles, and handed them around.

"Avast thar!" he growled. "It's our duty to save them lubbers!"

"You are right, Tim," coincided Jack. "In a few moments it will be all over but the shouting with the coach passengers. Let every one take his place! I'm going to drive the deers upon them and save those people!"

There was no hesitating now.

Each one had a post assigned to him and took it, whereupon the boy started the electric current, and turning on a full flood of light, the wagon rushed through the darkness and shot around a bend in the road.

As the glare of the search-light shot ahead, they saw a most tragic scene in the road in front of them.

There stood a stage-coach, one of its four horses shot, and its half-dozen inmates standing beside it in the road, with hands raised over their heads, menaced by a band of mounted masked men who swarmed among the trees bordering the road.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COLLISION.

"Down with the bandits!" shouted Jack, as with a rush the electric deers bore down upon the scene.

Tim and Fritz stood on the platforms, on either side of the Avalanche, armed with rifles, and clad in bullet-proof, metal suits, while Hopkins, similarly attired, stood in the

cage in back, with a basket of hand grenades near the open back door.

On rushed the deers, and as the blazing electric lights disclosed the strange-looking contrivance to the bandits and their victims, they were all so startled they cried out with alarm.

In a few moments the deers reached the scene of action.

The bandits gave utterance to yells of alarm and recoiled, the startled passengers of the stage coach fled right and left, and the horses pranced, snorted and strove to tear themselves away.

In the midst of this scene of confusion, Jack yelled:

"Fire upon them, boys!"

He brought the Avalanche to a pause.

Armed with a brace of pistols, he now fired upon their enemies through the open window.

Tim and Fritz followed his example.

Shot after shot was fired upon the outlaws.

None of the pneumatic weapons made any noise beyond the thud of escaping air; but the bullets were small bombs that burst upon contact with loud reports, and being filled with a high explosive called horrortite, invented by Jack, they scattered the particles of lead like rain, with fatal effect.

Horses and riders went down all around, some wounded and others were killed outright.

Furious explosions ensued when Hopkins began to hurl the terrible grenades, and so great was the force that trees and rocks about the places where they struck were blown to atoms.

The bandits fled in horror.

"It's the devil!" yelled one of them.

The awful destruction wrought by Jack and his friends impelled the rest to agree with this opinion.

Upon seeing that the inmates of the Avalanche were friends and rescuers, the coaching party quickly recovered from their momentary fright, and realizing that the electric machine was only a mechanical contrivance, they grasped their arms.

"Help has come!" cried one, excitedly. "Fire on the outlaws!"

Bang—bang—bang! rattled a salvo of shots.

The bandits were rendered desperate by the number of shots that were directed toward them, and those who were uninjured quickly returned a volley at the Avalanche and the coach passengers.

None of Jack's people were hurt.

Nor could rifle bullets penetrate the Avalanche or injure the deers; but several of the stage-coach people were wounded.

Volley after volley was now exchanged.

But unable to withstand such a terrible style of warfare Jack carried on, the bandits who escaped galloped away.

Down the gloomy road they fled for their lives, and away went the deers flying after them, our friends keeping up an incessant fire, wounding several more of them.

Jack was just in the act of firing a last shot at them when suddenly Fritz gave a yell and cried:

"Look out ahet!"

"Heavens! A large tree trunk has fallen across the road!" gasped Jack.

He twisted the wheel around and shut off power.

But the foremost deer struck the massive obstruction with a crash, and the leaders spun around and toppled over. In a moment the four deers were down, the long shafts were bent sidewise, and the wagon was twisted.

For a moment it looked as if the whole concern was wrecked, and a groan of dismay escaped Jack's lips.

"Ruined!" he muttered, despairingly.

Down to the ground he sprang, followed by his friends, and a quick examination of everything was made.

"Shiminey Christmas!" ejaculated Fritz.

"What's the matter now?" asked Jack, in alarm.

"Notings vhas proke!"

"Can it be possible?"

"Look for yourself, vonet."

"Sure enough!"

"Aye, now, but this are a lucky escape," said Tim.

"Fortunately I made the entire machine strong enough to stand all kinds of hard knocks," replied Jack. "But for a few moments I was doubtful about coming out of this safely, old fellow."

"Pon my word, I thought everything was wrecked," said Hopkins, joining them. "Can't you rectify the trouble?"

"Easily. But the bandits have escaped."

"Och! led 'em, so long as we don't vhas pusted up alretty!" said Fritz, lighting his pipe and setting to work on the deers.

They soon got everything in working order again, and found that nothing was broken at all.

"The outlaws must have skirted this tree trunk," said Jack.

"Aye, lad," assented Tim. "An' I reckon as they wuz ther ones as put it here ter trip up ther stage coach. If we'd a-sighted it afore, why, bless 'ee, we mightn't a-fouled it so hard. But say, lads, somethin' jist occurred ter me."

"What was it?" chorused the rest, interestedly.

"Why, when I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash—"

"Rats!" interposed Fritz, in disgust.

"Razzle-dazzle!" added the professor, disappointedly.

"Another of his lies!" muttered Jack, with a frown.

"We onct struck a reef," Tim went on, coolly, "an' a big hole wuz stove in ther bows, when, wot do yer think?"

"I think I'll go aboard the Avalanche," said Jack, moving away.

"And I," added Hopkins, following the young inventor.

"Yah, und I tin' so neider," Fritz put in, going with them. Tim's solitary eye sparkled.

He was getting angry.

"Avast thar!" he roared. "I wanter tell yer ther story."

No answer came back.

"Ther ship sunk!" yelled Tim, in exasperation.

Still no reply as the three friends marched ahead.

"We all wuz drowned!" continued the old sailor, frantically. None of the rest paid the least attention to him.

"An', goldurn ye!" roared the ancient mariner, "we're dead yet!"

Calmly ignoring him the rest mounted the Avalanche.

"All aboard!" cried Jack.

"Waal, dash me, now!" growled Tim, stumping aboard.

"That's tough!"

Jack turned the deers around, and, finding that they worked properly, he ran them back to the stage coach.

They found every one there jubilant over their escape, dressing their wounds and excitedly discussing the event.

Bringing the deers to a pause Jack alighted.

"Here's ther decent young feller as was afther savin' us, begorra!" exclaimed Terry McNulty, the stage driver, "an' it's our loives we're afther ownin' to him, so we do, me byes!"

"Jack Wright, at your service, gentlemen," said the boy, bowing.

"Three cheers for Jack Wright!" yelled Terry, waving his cap.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" cheered every one.

"Any of you badly hurt?" queried the boy.

"A few wounded slightly, yer honor," replied Terry.

"Did the bandits get any of your valuables?"

"Divil a cent's worth, sor."

"That's lucky, but I see they killed one of your horses."

"Shure, I don't moind a wee throifle loike that. Indade, a year past I've been skaimin' ter murdher that aould

buckskin, so's ter have more wurruk fur ther resht av me plugs."

"Do you know anything about the band who attacked you?"

"Do I? Och, but isn't this ter seventh toime they've sliptopped me. Faix, I'm that used to it now I couldn't be after dhroiving over this road at all, if it wasn't fer ther diversion av havin' them gossoons attackin' me. Shure, it plazed me, so it did, ter see yez puck 'em in ther wind this toime through, yer honor."

"Who is the leader of the band?"

"Who but that spalpeen, Tom King."

"Can it be possible?"

"Heard av him thin, have ye?"

"I'm here to jail the beggar."

"More power to yer elbow, an' it's hopin' yer will, I am!"

"Has he many more men?"

"Slathers av him. This gang wur only a poipeful."

Just then one of the attacked party dragged one of the wounded bandits over to the coach, bound hand and foot.

"Here's the tenth one I've found alive!" he remarked.

"Are ther resht kilt?" queried Terry.

"Yes," replied the man.

"Then, it's ter Brownsville we'll be afther takin' him, an', bedad, it's in jail they'll pop, d'yer moind, me friend?"

"Hold on! I want this man!" said Jack. "I'll take him aboard of my rig, and perhaps I may pump some valuable information out of him."

"Shure, it's glad I am ter be rid av one less av ther blackguards."

"Can you get along all right now?"

"We can that, wid agility," responded Terry.

Jack and his friends then took possession of the wounded outlaw, and taking leave of the people they rescued, mounted the Avalanche and rode away.

CHAPTER VII.

COCKTAIL HALL.

Away from the stage coach rolled the Avalanche, and making a detour of the obstructing tree trunk the deers came out on the road again, and sped along through the rain.

"Every delay is dangerous," said Jack. "If Tom King reaches Bear Gulch ahead of us our claim to the Lost Gold Mine is gone."

"Lor' bless us, lad!" replied Tim, taking a big chew of navy plug, "if we'd a-smashed ther bowsprits o' ther deers on that driftwood athwart our course, thar wouldn't a-been no makin' port ahead o' ther lubber at all, ter my way o' thinkin'."

"The rascal can't beat us there if nothing else occurs," the boy observed, and then, glancing down at their captive, he added, "and this rascal could give us a few points abont King and the gang that might prove of great value to us."

"Vhy don't yer dry him vonct?" queried Fritz, relieving Jack of the wheel.

"I might as well."

The captive scowled at him.

His black mask had been knocked from his face.

He was a great, hulking fellow in boots, patched pants, a red flannel shirt and a slouched hat.

His hair was cropped off and he wore a red, bushy beard, had a low, retreating forehead, small, twinkling eyes, and a big, knob-like nose.

A slight pallor overspread his tanned face as Jack turned toward him, for he recognized a most dangerous person in the plucky, young inventor, and feared him.

"'Twon't do ye no good, pilgrim," he blurted out, in course tones of defiance. "I ain't no kinder hand at bustin' ter glory a iron-clad oath wot all ther boys hes got ter took when they jines our happy band o' missionaries."

"Ah, you defy me, eh?" quietly asked Jack, elevating his eyebrows.

"Waal, I reckon."

"You are foolish. I am not to be defied."

"Humph!"

Jack saw that the fellow had settled upon obstinacy.

He resolved to break up this fit.

Procuring a piece of copper wire he fastened one end to the switch-board and twisted the other end around the man's wrist.

"I think I can break your will," he remarked, quietly.

"Hangin' wouldn't do it, pilgrim!" retorted the outlaw.

But he kept uneasily eyeing the wire, wondering what Jack was going to do with it, and fidgeted about uneasily.

"I will give you one chance more to confess everything I ask," said the young inventor. "If you fail to comply you will only be forced into obedience."

"Proceed wi' ther performance—I won't say nuthin'!" growled the man.

"Fritz!"

"Yah."

"Turn lever No. 10 to notch six."

"Yah."

"If he still refuses, turn it to notch twelve."

The Dutch boy nodded and complied, when, with a terrible yell, the bandit squirmed and struggled and rolled over and over, swearing, spouting and drawing horrible faces.

"Let up thar!" he howled, banging himself up and down in a frenzied paroxysm, as an electric current shot through him. "Holy smoke! I'm jammed full of fine needles! Great snortin' catamounts, pilgrim, take it off, will yer? Cuss yer ornary hide, don't yer see as I'm gittin' double-jinted? In one minute more my backbone'll be up aroun' my neck!"

Then he flip-flapped!

His head banged the floor.

He rolled his eyes, writhed, twisted and jerked.

"Will you confess?" queried Jack.

"No!" roared the bandit.

"Fritz—notch twelve. Make it twice as strong."

Around went the lever and a prolonged howl of agony escaped the man who never before knew what electricity was.

"Murder!" he screamed. "Holy jim-jams! I'm afire! I'm blazin'! Stop her! I'll speak! D'yer hear? Oh! Ouch! Oh-h-h-h-h—!"

Jack signaled to Fritz, and he shut off the current.

The outlaw's agony ceased like magic.

He lay perfectly quiet.

"I thought I'd bring you to time," said Jack.

A cold sweat broke out on the man's face, and he groaned:

"Let'r flicker. I'd answer anything sooner'n go through that agin."

"Where is Tom King's rendezvous?"

"In Bear Gulch, at Berry's saloon, called Cocktail Hall."

"How many men has he?"

"Well, a hundred afore you laid us out."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone East arter a feller named Fleetwood."

"To steal a paper from him about the Lost Mine?"

"Perzackly so, an' ther gang wuz in Keno Bob's han's."

"Who is Keno Bob?"

"He's leftenant, a corduroy dude from Deadwood."

"I n't the gang split up?"

"Y— in five sections, each numberin' twenty men."

"Scattered?"

"All over ther most likely roads."

"Did you have charge of this gang?"

"Yes."

Jack questioned him at some length further, and soon gained considerable information about the gang and the shortest road to Bear Gulch, for the man was in deadly terror of the electric current.

The boy was then satisfied.

"When we reach camp," said Jack, "I'll hand you to the regulators."

"Oh, say, don't do that—they'll send me up the flue!" exclaimed the man. "I'm dead wood fer ther vigilantes, an' a lynchin' fesibal'd jist suit 'em ef they knowed as it wuz Six-Shooter Sam wot yer got yer fins on."

"So you are marked meat for the buzzards, eh?"

"Waal, I reckon," admitted Six-Shooter Sam, with a shudder.

Jack saw that the man was in ill-repute in Bear Gulch, and congratulated himself for having captured a noted rascal.

The deers now went cutting cross-country.

It was fairly good traveling, with very little hills or timber, until they came to the rolling foot-hills of Custer's Peak, as they passed Pactola, Merritt, and struck the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad, which they followed northward from Rockford.

Turning north-westward from Whitewood Cross, they followed a great depression of the Black Hills around Custer's Peak, and before daybreak arrived in sight of Bear Gulch's lights.

It was a small place, of one hundred inhabitants, of the same description as most such towns, and Jack brought the deers to a pause not far from the town in a rocky, isolated pass and alighted.

Arming himself, the boy proceeded on foot to the town, and duly registered poor Dick Fleetwood's claim in his own name.

By this stroke he had forever put the possibility out of Tom King's way of laying claim to the mine.

The rain ceased, and a beautiful, clear day dawned.

Jack found the town full of miners, speculators, and different kind of characters common to such places.

He soon discovered Berry's saloon, at which the gambler prince made his headquarters.

It was a dingy, dirty dive, frequented by the toughest element in the settlement, and presided over by a half-breed of negro and Indian blood, who proved to be an individual in the regulation miner's costume, his bald head minus an ear, and his nose knocked out of joint.

It was toward midday, and the bright summer sun was shining down when Jack entered the saloon, and found a dozen hard citizens standing along the bar, filling up on law-proof whisky.

The boy sized them all up for a lawless crowd, and they calculated he was a tenderfoot imbued with the gold fever, come to prospect.

"What'll you have?" asked the proprietor of him.

"I've got a message to leave with you for Tom King," the boy replied.

"Oh—do you know Tom?"

"We have met."

"What's the message?"

"Just tell him Jack Wright is in town—that he is baffled—"

"Yes—"

"And that I've staked my claim on the Lost Gold Mine."

"Thunder!"

A murmur ran from mouth to mouth among the loafers, and Berry gave a violent start, and almost turned pale.

The next moment he hit the bar with a gin bottle so hard that it was smashed to jingling fragments.

"Thwarted!" he gasped.

"Exactly," was the boy's cool reply.

"By you?"

"By me."

As Berry knew about King's pursuit of Fleetwood, he realized that the bandit had been foiled by this boy by some means.

The silence that ensued was now broken by the furious clatter of horses' hoofs outside, and they paused at the door.

A moment later two men rushed in.

They were Tom King and Keno Bob.

At one quick glance they saw Jack and paused.

"There he is now," exclaimed the bandit, pointing at Jack.

They had just been to the registrar and found that the boy had baffled them.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RIOT IN BEAR GULCH.

For a few moments a deathly silence ensued in the saloon, and Jack saw that every loafer in the place was a friend of King's by the way in which they scowled at him.

But the calm exterior and cool smile did not desert Jack.

He did not even attempt to draw a weapon, but unflinchingly met the frowns of his enemies, and quickly calculated what they might do.

King had turned as pale as death.

There was an ugly gleam in his dark eyes, and he kept twisting at his curling black mustache with one hand, and nervously fingering the butt of a revolver in the belt of his corduroy suit.

"Beaten!" he exclaimed. "Beaten! Beaten!"

"Of course," assented Jack, with a nod.

"Killed and wounded a number of my friends, too, I heard."

"Right again, you murderer."

"Really, it's maddening to say the least."

"That's because you ain't accustomed to being baffled."

Keno Bob aimed a brace of pistols at Jack.

"Hands up!" he exclaimed harshly.

"That command comes of practice by you as a road agent," remarked Jack.

"Do as I tell you, or I'll fire!" said the dude from Deadwood.

A scornful peal of laughter pealed from Jack's lips, and glancing around indifferently he saw that every man in Cocktail Hall, including the baldheaded bartender, had him covered with a weapon. It then flashed across the boy's mind that the loafers might all belong to King's gang of bandits.

To any ordinary person a most uncomfortable feeling might have been entertained to observe that grim array of weapons bristling on all sides and every finger on a trigger.

But Jack Wright did not show any timidity.

"I'm in a hornet's nest!" he muttered.

Keno Bob whispered to his captain, and then sung out:

"I'll count three. If you then fail to obey me down you go in your tracks like a log, young feller."

"Oh, come," chaffed the boy. "Draw it milder, stranger!"

"You are in my power," hissed Tom King, "and we're going to keep you, see? Every man in this place is under my command."

"Hold on with the circus until I tell you something, King."

"What now?" sullenly demanded the outlaw chief.

"Do you know Six-Shooter Sam?"

"Ought to," replied King, nursing the hand Jack wounded at Rapid City."

"He's in my power."

"The deers!"

"If I fall to return he dies!"

Every one exchanged significant glances of alarm, and a party of miners just then attempted to enter the saloon to get a drink, but seeing how matters stood inside they retreated.

Jack keenly eyed his enemies and saw by their dismay that they held the life of Six-Shooter Sam very high.

King soon came to a conclusion.

"In that case you'll have to cave," he remarked.

"Why shall I?" the boy replied, with asperity.

"We'll hold you hostage for Sam's safe return."

"That's ther ticket!" exclaimed one of the loafers, admiringly.

"Make a prisoner of me?" demanded Jack.

"Man for man," grimly answered King. "I'd like to even up by blowing your head off, though. Now submit, or go under. We hold a royal flush, and it beats your hand all to pieces."

Jack had been talking to gain time, in order to put in operation a plan he devised to defend himself.

There was a powerful, but small electric battery in his pocket, to the two wires of which were attached two carbon points, and he quietly and unperceived set the battery in operation, and, thrusting a hand in each of his coat pockets, seized the rubber-handled carbons.

He then withdrew them, and bringing the carbon points together, a sheet of fire a foot long, flew from the ends with a crackling and hissing noise.

The boy spurted the jet of scorching flame around in a circle, and the bandits gave a yell and recoiled as the fiery tongue touched some of them.

The next instant Jack was darting about the saloon like a will-o'-the-wisp sending the scorching sparks flying in all directions.

With a wild rush the bandits broke for the door, and went flying out to the street, tumbling over each other and yelling like madmen as the flames burnt them.

"Scat there!" shouted Jack, grinning with delight at the evident terror of the bandits. "Out with you! I'll own this dive or burst! Scatter, you rogues—I want more room."

Without firing a single shot the outlaws vacated the premises, and as soon as the barkeeper had followed the gang the boy paused in the middle of the room and burst into an uproarious peal of laughter.

"Hurrah for me!" he chuckled. "They may take me for a tenderfoot, but I think there was something cyclonic about the way I cleaned out this dive."

Hearing a furious noise in the street, Jack strode to the door just in time to see the gang go flying down the main street of the settlement helter-skelter.

The cause of it soon became apparent.

Up the street he saw the Avalanche come flying along in pursuit of them with Hopkins at the wheel, and Tim and Fritz on the front platform armed with their rifles.

"King fears the machine now," chuckled Jack, "and he has warned his confederates of the danger of meeting the deers."

Along came the deers, and away dashed the outlaws for the woods close by the settlement.

"Hello!" shouted the boy, as the Avalanche came up to him.

"Shiminey!" gasped Fritz. "Dere vhas Shack alretty!"

"Stop her."

"No need of going further to find him," said Hopkins.

He brought the deers to a pause, and Jack hastened out, got aboard of the wagon, and told his friends what occurred.

"Keel haul me now," said Tim, giving a hitch at his pants, "but you had a narrer escape, my hearty. Yer see as we wuz afeered sommat had happened yer, so we got under sail, and shaped our course fer this harbor ter find out."

"I'm glad you came," said the boy. "I want to dispose of

Six-Shooter Sam. Hello, here comes a crowd of curious citizens."

The advent of the electric deers had brought out all the settlers in Bear Gulch, and headed by an old gray-bearded fellow in buckskins and beaver cap, who ran the grocery store, they approached.

Coming to a pause at a safe distance from the Avalanche, they curiously viewed the machine awhile, and talked among themselves.

"Say, pilgrims," bawled Hank Busby, the store-keeper, presently, "what in blazes d'yer call that air masheen, anyway?"

Jack went out on the forward deck and took off his hat.

"Gentlemen," said he, bowing, "I want to introduce myself. I'm Jack Wright, the boy inventor, and this is my electric deer carriage from Wrightstown, in the East. I'm here to hustle all the bandits from the Black Hills, and assert my right to the Lost Gold Mine, to which I've registered my claim. I've begun the show by tackling Tom King and his gang in Cocktail Hall, and if any of you citizens of Bear Gulch see any reason for interfering with me, speak now, or, as the preacher says, forever after hold your peace!"

"Waal, I'll be blowed!" ejaculated Hank. "What in blazes do yer think o' thet, feller citizens, citizens, an' other fellers?"

"I reckon thar ain't nuthin' agin law in what his intenshuns is," remarked one of the miners, "an' fer my part, I'm blamed glad he's tooken up ther work wot ther vigilantes looks arter."

"Amen, ses I, ter that," advocated Hank. "Is that reg'lar, fellers?"

"Yes, yes," chorused the rest.

"Then hurroar fer Jack Wright, ses I."

"Hurroar!" yelled the citizens.

"I've cleaned out Cocktail Hall," said Jack, "because it is the rendezvous of Tom King's gang, and Berry stands in so thick with the bandit that he and his pals just tried to kill me on account of my trying to baffle a crooked game of the outlaws and give you a chance to have a lynching bee."

"Let's burn ther all-fired ole nest o' pesky varmints down!" shouted Hank. "This yar camp ain't got no use fer ther dirty hole anyway. Thar's nigh onter forty houses in Bar Gulch, an' twenty on 'em gin mills, so thar's pizen shops enough without his'n."

"Ay! Burn it down!" roared the crowd.

And away they went and set fire to the ramshackle old building, which soon was in a roaring mass of flames.

The crowd was excited.

"I'll keep them busy," said Jack, and he yelled: "I say."

"Waal?" demanded Hank.

"Know Six-Shooter Sam?"

"Ay, an' he's ther wust cuss ever had a price set on his neck."

"Want him?"

"We're all a-weepin' ter git him fer warious murders in this camp."

"Then here he is," said Jack, nodding to Tim and Fritz.

They dropped their frightened captive out on the road, and a yell of delight burst from the crowd as they pounced on him. "Lynch him!" they yelled.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD JUDGE LYNCH.

A howl of fear escaped Six-Shooter Sam, for he saw that he was about to pay the penalty for his crimes at the hands of the mob.

Some one brought a rope with a noose in the end, which was adjusted around the neck of the outlaw, another man cut

the bonds on his ankles, and several more jerked him to his feet.

"Away wi' ther sneakin' coyote ter ther blasted tree!" yelled Hank.

The crowd closed around the doomed wretch in a solid mass, every one of the regulators grasping a weapon in his hand, and while two of them seized their unwilling victim by the arms and dragged him along, the procession passed through the main street.

All the outlaws had disappeared.

The burning saloon threw a crimson glare over the scene.

Women and children flocked to the doors and windows of the shanties, gazing on in awe, and people who came and went from the settlement joined the lynching party.

Jack remained aboard of the Avalanche.

"Mercy!" shrieked the doomed man, in pleading tones.

"Say, did ye hev mercy on ther poor feller ye stabbed in ther back, fer ther sake o' robbin' him o' his savin's last week?" asked the angry storekeeper. "No—yer didn't. Thought as ye wuz safe under ther purtectin' wing o' their angils o' that Satan cuss, King, didn't ye? Lordy, now, but thar's a certing kind o' law an' order in this yar community, pilgrims, an' you've bucked up agin it hard."

"I want a fair trial!" bellowed the murderer.

"Oh, we'll gi' it to ye, on'y keep a stiff upper lip," answered Hank, with a grin, as he came to a pause on the outskirts of the town in front of the gnarled trunk of an old oak tree with a conveniently projecting stout branch. "I'll hold court right yar."

The rest of the crowd halted in a circle around them, and the old settler squatted down on a rock and said:

"Thar won't be no fussin'. I'm ther jedge, an' allers hev been in this yar bloomin' nest o' honest Johns an' crooked snides, an' I'll app'int Bingo Charley, Si Jaskins an' Mustang Moses, the jury. I'm a-singin' ther gospel hymn o' ther prosecution, feller-citizens, an' I'll leave that ring-tailed coyote ter derfend hisself. Are yers ready?"

"Yes," assented the jurymen, separating from the rest.

"Then the court is opened, citizens," declared Hank, grimly.

It was an odd court of justice, but every soul was honest, if rough, in that rude crowd, and the prisoner was sure of fair play.

Pallid and trembling he stood with his hands bound behind his back, in front of Hank, the rope around his neck, and the other end of it held by half a dozen of the regulators.

Plainly revealed in the midday sunshine, the balmy summer breeze rustling the greensward, and the merry chirping of birds lending sweet music to the solemn scene, the old grocer said:

"I'll go on wi' ther case, citizens, fer ther people. This 'ere onary cuss las' Wednesday night wuz in Berry's saloon, an' seen poor Bob Maynard wi' a leetle money in his pocket, follered him out ter his quarters, an' stabbed him in ther back an' robbed him. Is Al Tinken here wot seed ther dirty work done?"

"Yair," said one of the spectators, moving forward.

"Do yer take yer solemn oath Six Shooter murdered Maynard?"

"I sw'ar!" replied the miner, uncovering his head reverently.

"D'yer hear that, jury?" excitedly asked Hank.

"Yes!" replied the three, in chorus.

"Then wot's ther verdict, goldurn ye?"

"Ain't I got no say?" howled the accused man, glaring around like a wild beast at the jurors.

"Wot kin ye say agin sich plump evidence as that. I'd like ter know?" growled Hank, taking a chew of tobacco.

"I'm innercent!" roared the accused. "I done it in self-defense."

"You're a liar!" said Hank. "It's a freezin' murder in ther fust degree, an' I finds yer guilty, ter say nuthin' o' yer other crimes, erbout wot we ain't got no evidence handy. I now charges ther jury as good feller-citizens ter hang ye by ther windpipe till yer croak, an' may ther Lord ha' marcy on yer soul, Amen! Now, Charley——"

"I say hang ther cuss!"

"Si—wot's your verdick?"

"I'm agreeable wi' Charley."

"An' you, Mose?"

"String him up!"

"That settles it, gents—let him swing!" said Hank.

"Hooray!" yelled the crowd, drowning the scream of terror that pealed from the condemned man's lips, and they dragged him beneath the long, horizontal branch and flung a rope over it.

Another of the regulators got Six Shooter Sam up on his shoulders.

"Gimme ther word when ter drop him, pard!" he yelled.

"Hoist away thar!" roared Hank.

The rope was pulled taut.

In one moment more the rascal would have been hung.

At this critical juncture a man emerged from a mass of rock, off in back of the tree, and held up his right hand.

"Stop that racket, boys!" he cried, "or it will be the worse for you!"

"It's Tom King!" shouted Hank, furiously.

"String up the murderer!" roared one of the regulators.

The men started to run with the end of the rope, when King blew a shrill blast upon a whistle, and two score of men in black masks appeared from behind the rocks.

They were all armed to the teeth.

"Fire upon them!" cried King.

A volley poured from the bandits' weapons, wounding several of the lynching party.

Six-Shooter Sam fell to the ground as the miners dropped the rope and scattered.

The miners fired back at the outlaws.

With that King ordered his men to charge on the Bear Gulch men, and they broke from the fastness of the rocks and ran for the miners, who fled down the road outnumbered.

Several volleys of shots were exchanged, and a scene of intense excitement ensued, during which King liberated the condemned murderer, who thereupon joined his ranks after being furnished with arms and ammunition.

In the midst of the fray Jack sent the deers flying from the town toward the combatants as he saw what was going on.

Every one of the inmates of the Avalanche had donned their metal suits now, and when the deers went dashing toward the outlaws, they took fright, ceased hostilities against the miners and fled among the rocks again.

"Fire upon them, boys!" cried Jack, ringingly, as he drove the deers from the road toward the rascals.

Shot after shot pealed out from the Avalanche, and terrible reports succeeded the explosion of the bullets.

Several of the bandits were wounded, but their companions hastily seized upon them and drew them behind the rocks.

From their point of shelter the miscreants poured volley after volley of bullets down at the deers and wagon.

They struck the Avalanche all over, but failed to penetrate the tough wire and strong metal of the central turret.

On dashed the machine through a pass Jack saw, and the bandits ahead of her fled to the most inaccessible places for the deers to get, where they safely ensconced themselves, and then began to pour down a disastrous fire.

Jack drove the deers ahead until the pass he was in began to narrow, and instead of emerging into the open plain as he expected it to, further advance was abruptly cut off ahead by a high wall.

Here the deers were forced to pause.

They could not go any further.

In order to get out it would be necessary to back them.

"We are caught in a tight hole now, boys!" said Jack.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Hopkius, "how are we to get out of here?"

"By backing," replied the boy.

Just then they heard a series of frightful crashes behind them, and glancing back saw that several of the bandits up on the acclivities in back on either side were rolling boulders down into the pass trying to hit the deers.

The Avalanche was in a sort of basin with steep rocks all around her, and to Jack's alarm he observed that if the swarming bandits so desired they could now drop the rocks down upon the roof of the Avalanche and crush them to death.

Shot after shot was fired at the outlaws, driving them back, but several rocks were sent flying at the wire cages with fearful force.

A hole was burst through the front cage, and the door of the rear one was broken down at the hinges.

Upon seeing that the Avalanche was accessible the bandits came swarming from their coverts, and despite the deadly fire poured out at them, many of the rascals reached the machine.

All over it they swarmed, and Jack yelled:

"Into the turret, boys—they've gained the cage!"

Dashing through the doors into the metallic turret, they disappeared just as several of the outlaws got into the front and back cages.

CHAPTER X.

BURSTING A POWDER MAGAZINE.

By getting into the wire cages the outlaws imagined they had the advantage of Jack's party, but they soon found their mistake.

Our friends were as far out of their reach as ever, for there was no breaking down those strong, metal doors.

Jack and his friends went upstairs to the loop-holes and stationed themselves at them to renew their shots at their enemies.

But something the outlaws said arrested the boy's attention.

"Hold on!" he remarked. "There's a way for us to get out of here. I just heard one of them propose to drag the machine from the pass with a rope in order to have more room, as in this small place we have the advantage of them. They can't move away and around as freely as they wish to. Nothing would please me better than to have them haul us out so they can proceed against us."

They waited.

As no shots came from our friends, the outlaws concluded that there was no way for them to fire from the turret.

This emboldened the bandits.

They fastened a rope to the Avalanche, while some were trying to get inside the turret, and pulled it out of the basin.

But they did not drag it far along the pass.

Jack went up in the cupola on top.

From here he had an uninterrupted view all around, and saw that the bandits had a cavern opening on to the pass, in and out of which several of them kept going, carrying different things their leader had sent for.

The appearance of the boy in the cupola was a signal for the sharpshooters concealed among the rocks to fire upon him, and a veritable hail of bullets struck the wire.

It easily withstood them.

The Avalanche now came to a pause over a mound in the ground, and upon catching sight of it Jack gave a violent start.

He anxiously peered down at it.

"Looks like a huge grave mound," he muttered.

One of the bandits now drew near the Avalanche, as the rest had left it, and Jack saw him stoop beside the mound and scrape away the dirt beside a peculiar-looking stone.

A piece of lead pipe was exposed, in which lay a fuse which the man ignited with a match; he then ran away, and all the rascals who a moment before had been surrounding the Avalanche also vanished from view among the rocks.

"By heavens! they've dragged us over a powder magazine!" shouted Jack, descending into the turret. "That fellow has lit a fuse to blow it up, and this machine with it!"

He flew downstairs as he gave this startling news, and opening the door, out he rushed into the cage, expecting every moment to have the magazine blow up beneath them.

To his dismay he saw that the outlaws had wrenched the lever-board down, rendering it useless.

Back into the turret he rushed without losing a second, however, for there was a second lever-board in there, provided against any accident happening to the one in the cage.

By turning a switch he put these wires into connection with the storage batteries and cut out the other board.

He then turned another lever, dashed out into the cage in less time than it occupies to describe his actions, and as the deers began to rapidly move, he grasped the wheel.

Away backed the deers with wonderful speed, and a yell came from the bandits, accompanied by several shots.

Back, back, back went the machine as quick as a flash from over the mound, and the hissing fuse was left burning ahead of the deers.

Jack glanced toward the back of the wagon.

There was a clear road to travel over, and just then Fritz yelled from within the turret:

"I vhas by der lefer-poard, Shack, gief your orders vonct."

"Drive her backward—full speed!" replied the boy.

"Yah! Dere she vhas alretty."

"Good! Keep her so! Now, you beggar, I'll beat you yet."

"She vhas glear ouf dot bowder magazines yet vonct alretty?"

"Yes; it's away back there, and—"

Boom! Crash!

The magazine exploded.

A fearful, stunning report rang out.

It was followed by a glaring mass of flame shooting up from the ground, and a cloud of dense smoke, dust, dirt, stones and timber burst up all around and darkened the air.

The shock flung Jack to the floor.

He got up immediately, half stifled from the smoke, dirt and burnt powder, his head throbbing and his eyes aching.

Millions of stones, blown to fragments, flew about, bombarding everything in the pass, and showers of them rattled against the fast-backing machine.

The young inventor grasped the wheel again, and keeping his glance fixed upon the pass, drove the machine out from among the rocks again to the road.

Nothing more was seen of the bandits.

The explosion had battered the wagon considerably, and part of the cage was broken, but the metal suit worn by the boy had saved him from getting injured by the particles of flying stone that came through the breach.

As soon as they were on clear ground, Jack shouted:

"Reverse your lever and send her forward, Fritz!"

"Let her go vonct!" came the reply a moment afterward.

The deers stopped backing.

They then dashed ahead, as they fortunately had been far enough away from the magazine to escape injury.

Avay rushed the wagon toward Bear Gulch, and upon running into the settlement the boy saw that all the regulators

were back there, and that Cocktail Hall had been burnt to the ground.

Every one came crowding around the deers, for they saw at once that Jack's invention had met with rough treatment, and asked what had happened to them.

As soon as the boy told them Hank Busby remarked:

"By gol! I thought so, citizens!"

"Thought what?" queried Jack, anxiously.

"Why, pilgrim, can't ye see as them 'ere raskils mout have a stronghold up thet thar pass some'res? How in thunder would they happen to have that 'ere powder magazine planted in ther arth if it wuzn't to perdeck a stronghold o' their'n? Besides, whar did ther ropes come from as they yanked your outfit with?"

"Just my opinion," replied Jack.

"Waal, wot's ter be did now? You're badly busted up."

"Oh, I can repair the damage done to the Avalanche," said Jack.

"I hope so. Ye don't know what a power o' good you're a-doin' this yar settlement by tackling them dirty coyotes, you don't; an' if you'll jest step up to my store I'll stan' up the drinks for you an' your friends till yer jist so full as ter go cock-eyed."

Jack thanked him, but declined the invitation.

Instead, he called a council of his friends and they set to work upon the damage and began to repair it, watched all the afternoon by the people who came that way.

By dusk everything was repaired, and the deers and wagon were in as good condition as ever, excepting for the bruises it got.

Our friends shut themselves up in the turret and had supper.

"I'm going out to the mine we're after as soon as our meal is finished," said Jack, "and I presume that as Tom King intends to contend against our gaining the lead he will station some of his men in the cavern to keep us away and make it hot for us. But I'm going to assert my rights here just the same. Every man in Bear Gulch has to be his own judge, lawyer, and policeman, I see, and I'll hold up my rights if I have to do it with weapons."

"Ay, now, that's ther talk!" said Tim, nodding approvingly.
"I tink so neider," added Fritz.

"For my part," said the nervous professor, "I cannot say I expected to encounter so much danger, and I don't like the risk we are running and wish you'd turn back."

"Impossible!" replied Jack. "I am going to inspect that mine and then run over to Deadwood City and make arrangements there for running it, after which these bandits must be exterminated from the Black Hills, so we can properly conduct working the mine."

With this understanding they finished supper.

Jack then called upon Hank Busby, and gaining information as to the direction he was to take, he returned to the Avalanche, got aboard and told his friends what he had learned.

The deers were then started.

Cheered by every one, they passed through the settlement, for the people of Bear Gulch realized how valuable the strange invention had proven itself to them within less than a day.

Out on the country road which was used by the express coach ran the deers, heading for the southwest, to where the big gulch on that side of Custer's Peak ran up into the rocks, marking the spot where the Lost Gold Mine lay.

The moon and stars shone in the clear, blue sky, and as the towering hills drew nearer, an eager look crept over the faces of our friends.

For they expected soon to see the most famous mine in the Black Hills.

CHAPTER XI.

LOCATING THE LOST GOLD MINE.

By referring to the paper which he had wrested from Tom King the young inventor knew exactly where to look for the Lost Gold Mine, as the explanations were easily understood.

The great gulch was reached and the deers ran into it.

High, rugged walls towered up several hundred feet on each side, making the place as dark as midnight, and the bottom proved to be rough and rocky, necessitating very slow traveling.

By the rays of the search-lights, however, they were able to see their way far ahead and all around.

A sharp lookout was kept up for an ambuscade, as Jack expected to find his enemies watching for his approach night and day.

In this manner they followed the course of a stream that ran down through the gulch, and were unmolested by any one.

Reaching the end of the gulch, they finally came to a huge opening answering the description in the paper, big enough to drive in the deers, upon doing which they found themselves in a mighty natural cavern of unknown dimensions.

It was evidently the result of some great convulsion of nature, for the rocks and stones were piled up and tumbled about much as if the place had been riven by an earthquake.

Far ahead in the gloom a hole in the roof let a broad shaft of daylight stream down into the place, cutting through the darkness like a knife.

Jack steered the deers toward it.

The light streamed down upon a white object.

Upon a nearer approach our friends saw that it was the skeleton of a man.

Alighting from the Avalanche, the boy picked up the grinning skull, and his eye caught a small round hole in the middle of the forehead.

It was made by a rifle bullet.

Whether it was the result of accident, murder, or suicide, Jack had no idea—the lone skeleton told a mournful tale of death in the solitude of this vast cavern, though wrapped in a deep mystery which they could not then solve.

He tossed the skull down on the floor.

"Unfortunate wretch!" he muttered grimly.

The skull fell into a small hollow, and the boy saw at once that the place was filled by a true vein of gold.

He uttered an exclamation, knelt down and, carefully examining it, saw that he stood beside the Lost Gold Mine.

The others now joined him, and they investigated the lead.

"We need look no further," said Jack. "The mine is here."

"Don't 'pear ter me as if King's been here yet," said Tim.

"No one has disturbed the place since Fleetwood found it."

"But dot don't say dey von't soon come," said Fritz.

"I think I'll go back to the Avalanche," said Hopkins, nervously, as he glanced over his shoulder.

"Not yet--professor," said Jack. "We must look at this lead well ere we begin operations to mine it."

Hopkins was reluctantly obliged to remain.

An hour passed by, during which our friends examined the mine very carefully, and then their work was finished.

They returned aboard of the Avalanche and started for the exit.

Out he ran into the gulch again when a series of reports rang out on either side of her, and two volleys of rifle balls crashed against the deers and wagon.

"Ain't dot?" said Jack.

"I don't vha' een nobody," replied Fritz. "Ever re' If I ain't sorry we aln't got a pneumatic gun

aboard," growled Tim. "We'd soon make driftwood o' them lubbers."

None of the bullets had penetrated the metal work.

Jack glanced around and started both search-lights, sending a streak behind and ahead that brilliantly lit up the rocks, when they all observed a number of polished blue rifle barrels leaning on top of them.

"Tom King has mustered his forces," said Jack, calculatingly, "and he evidently means to fight us away from here if he can."

"Sure," assented Fritz. "But I don't tink me dot he could, also."

"I'm going to get a gang of miners here as soon as possible," said the boy, "and begin to work this claim, and I'll have a large enough crowd to hold King off, too."

He was just going to tell his friends to return the fire of the bandits, when they all suddenly disappeared.

"Durn their hides!" growled Tim, his solitary eye snapping fire. "They didn't wait fer us ter gi' them a broadside. It reminds me o' ther time I wuz aimin' a gun on ther old Wabash at a shore fortress durin' ther war. Jist as I wuz about ter pull ther lock-string, by gosh, a earthquirk came an' swallowed ther fort up in one gulp."

Fritz picked up an old accordion and played a dead march.

"Wot are yer a-doin' that fer?" growled Tim, who hated the instrument.

"Dot's a det march," replied Fritz.

"I know it is."

"Dot march was blayed when dot story vhas invented."

"When my yarn wuz invented?"

"Yah. Der march vhas two hundred years oldt to-night."

Tim uttered a roar, and hopped toward Fritz to pulverize the music, when the Dutch boy dashed away and the old sailor followed him.

Jack did not remain where he was on a blind hunt for the concealed outlaws, but drove the Avalanche along.

"We can't catch the beggars," said he to Hopkins. "They can easily evade us among the rocks. It's no use wasting time. I'll start right off for Deadwood."

"I agree with you. Useless exposure of our lives to danger does not suit my practical way of thinking," said Hopkins, in nervous tones. "It is better to act sensibly over it."

The moonlight now flooded the gulch, and lit up the way. Nothing more was seen o' the outlaws.

The Avalanche soon left the gulch and passing out on the open plain started northward for Carbonate, in Centennial Park, to follow the pass around to Deadwood.

The distance was about forty miles to Deadwood by the circuitous route he was forced to follow in order to keep level ground, but in a bee-line it would not have been half that number of miles.

"We can make it easily in two hours," said Jack to Hopkins.

"No doubt, my good fellow, no doubt. The deers work like a charm now, and the bullets of the outlaws don't seem to have hurt them one bit."

"Everything upon them is made of such strong metal," replied the boy, "that nothing short of a cannon ball would affect them."

"Wonderful invention! How life-like their movements are--how naturally they step--how swiftly they go, without a stumble, without a hitch in the mechanism, and without a sound!"

His admiration was deserved, for the graceful creatures were certainly objects of wonder in their adjustment.

Along they swept with a broad plain to the left, and the lofty Black Hills to the right, a cool breeze blowing and the entire scene flooded with silvery moonlight.

Carbonate soon loomed up.

It was a small place, with a population of 173 souls, a money

order post-office and a telegraph station, connected with Deadwood City by a stage-coach line.

As the Avalanche drew near the settlement a man mounted on a fiery mustang, and leading four more similar beasts dashed out on the plain, and headed for the northward.

He rode as if he was in a great hurry, and ever and anon glanced back over his shoulder, as if expecting pursuit.

"See there," said Jack, pointing at him. "Looks suspicious?"

"Verily," assented Hopkins, with a curious look.

"He is going as fast as his mustangs can travel."

"But why is he looking back that way?"

"He probably fears pursuit."

"Then you think he is engaged in some nefarious work?"

"Looks to me like horse stealing," replied Jack.

"Oh, my! You must be right—see there!" cried Hopkins.

Several more men had now appeared, pursuing the other at breakneck speed, yelling and firing pistol shots.

They had inferior mounts, however, and the fugitive kept steadily distancing them and remained out of pistol range.

Away they sped over the plain, but the pursuers lost ground.

"They can't catch the horse-thief," said Jack, keenly watching them.

"How unfortunate! It will encourage the wretch to repeat his crime if he manages to get away from them," regretfully said Hopkins.

"You are right. I have a great mind to assist the pursuers."

"Do you think we can overhaul him, Jack?"

"He has got two miles the lead on us, but I'm sure we can do it," said the boy.

"Then try it."

"I shall."

And so saying, Jaek turned the wheel, swinging the heads of the deers around in a line with the flying horseman, and put on full power.

Away dashed the Avalanche at double speed, and she rapidly began to overhaul the pursued man.

A yell of dismay pealed from the pursuing miners when they saw the strange machine come flying up to them, and they got out of the way, allowing the Avalanche to dash by them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INFORMER

"Stop where you are or we'll run you down."

It was Jack's clarion tones that gave out this stern order, and the fugitive glanced back at the rattling machine in pursuit of him, a frightened expression crossed his face, and with an exclamation he reined in his mustang so suddenly as to nearly throw it.

"What's the matter with you?" he cried in excited tones.

"You'll see," replied Jaek, significantly.

He ran the deers up to the man and stopped them, for the mustangs had taken fright at it and began to rear, plunge, and kick with every evidence of intense nervousness.

The man was as pale as death.

"I can't hold the frightened beasts," he exclaimed.

"You must," answered Jack, with a frown.

"But I tell you—"

"Stay where you are till your pursuers come up."

Jack aimed a revolver at him, but he let the horses go.

Away they dashed, and might have escaped had not one of the pursuers gone flying after them.

He caught the beasts a short distance away.

The others saw that the occupants of the Avalanche were holding the horse-thief up, and realizing that they were friends, came fearlessly up to the deers.

"Hello there, stranger. Are you doin' that for us?" yelled one.

"Yes—come along and get your man," called Jack.

"Let me go," pleaded the thief. "They'll hang me."

"They will give you justice," replied Jack quietly.

"Won't you let me run chances for my life by flying?"

"No. You'd get shot down in your tracks like a dog."

Just then the strangers rode up to the Avalanche.

"You're a gone case now, Deadwood Dave," hissed one of them.

"Hold on, gentlemen," interposed Jack. "One word, please."

"Well?" queried the new arrivals, glancing at the boy.

"What has this man done?"

"Stole our mustangs."

"What do you intend to do to him for it?"

"Hang him to the nearest tree, of course."

"You won't do anything of the kind, if I can help it."

"That's the law in this section, young feller."

"It's too severe punishment for the crime."

"Can't help it, boss, it's the rule, and we're a-goin' to carry it out."

"Not in this case; Deadwood Dave is my prisoner, remember."

"But—"

"And I have a right to dictate his fate."

"Oh, pshaw!"

"If you don't promise to turn him over to the law to be dealt with," said Jaek, "I won't let you have him, gentlemen."

The strangers were provoked at this arrangement.

Conferring together a moment, the spokesman then said:

"Sorry, cap, but we can't agree."

"Very well—clear out. I've saved your mustangs for you and if you can't do as I ask you must be very ungrateful."

"Do yer mean ter say we can't have Deadwood Dave?"

"Not unless you do as I say," replied Jaek, coolly.

Another consultation between the men ensued.

Then the speaker turned to Jaek and said frankly:

"As he will get a long sentence for his crime we'll agree."

"Swear to have him put in prison."

"I swear it as heaven hears me, stranger."

"Then take your man."

Deadwood Dave cast a grateful glance at Jack.

"You have got me in this trouble by your interference," said he, "but you've saved my life. That balances the matter. I'm mad at you, but since you are on the square I won't hold any spite."

"This man is the most notorious horse thief in Dakota!" said the man, cantering up to Jack's prisoner with a revolver in his hand. "Now, Deadwood Dave, put your hands behind your back."

The captured horse thief complied, and the man bound him with a lariat coiled on his Mexican saddle pommel.

As soon as the prisoner was secured the man from Carbonate said:

"I'm obliged to you, youngster."

"Don't mention it," replied Jack.

"Now, Deadwood Dave, come along."

And seizing the bridle of the thief's mustang the man and his companions rode away to the settlement with their ponies and prisoner.

Jaek started the Avalanche along again.

"I've done the community a good turn now," he observed.

"Lord save ye, lad," replied Tim. "had it a-been me I'd a-said hang him!"

"Yah, I tink me so neider, alretty wonet!" declared Fritz.

"He don't deserve such excessive treatment," remarked Hopkins.

"You lie!"

"Eh?" gasped Hopkins, turning red in the face and confronting Tim.

"Go to blazes!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed the professor, facing Fritz, angrily.

"Ha! ha! ha! Oh, hully gee!"

Hopkins now saw that neither Tim nor Fritz had spoken, but discovered Bismarck standing in back of them uttering these remarks.

A grunt of disgust escaped the professor, and every one laughed at him.

"I tink me dot barrots could spoken himself yust a leedle," said Fritz, proudly. "Och! did you nefer seen such a birds. Dim, you ouldt son-of-a-sea-gooks, your mongey don't vhas in id mit Bismarck aroundt."

"Get out!" growled Tim, casting his solitary eye on the monkey, which sat in a corner intently licking its fur. "I'll allow your blasted ole parrot's got ther gift o' gab, but that's whee all its 'semblance to a human critter ends," and as a triumphant look stole over his rugged face, he turned to Fritz and said:

"Now, thar's Whiskers. Looker him—he's more like man in his ways an' looks than your cussed ole bird. D'yee see what he's a-doin'? Ain't it human? Lor' save yer, at this werry minute he's a-doin' wot I'll be doin' when I turns out o' my berth in ther mornin'—see if he ain't."

And Tim pointed at Whiskers, who had been washing himself.

But when the rest looked at the monkey it was picking flees from its skin.

A roar of laughter followed.

"So dot vhas vot you'll be doin' in der mornin', hey?" chuckled Fritz.

Tim was wild with mortification.

"He's went off on another tack!" he growled.

Jack sent the Avalanche through the Crow Peak pass to Terraville and headed south-eastward for Deadwood City.

In due time the deers came to a pause in a thick copse of woods, outside of the town, and remained there till morning, Jack in the meantime going into town.

On the following day all the boy's arrangements were completed.

He had a gang of miners employed, machinery bought, and the protection of troops given him by the governor, to get his mining operations under way.

The boy went to a hotel, and after having luncheon he inscribed a letter to Mrs. Fleetwood at Wrightstown, telling her of his success thus far, and apprising her of what his plans were for the operation of the Lost Gold Mine.

Having completed his letter in the reading-room he sealed it up, addressed the envelope, stuck a postage stamp on it and walked over to the letter-box to drop it, when another man reached the box the same time he did.

He, too, had a letter that he wished to drop in the box.

Involuntarily both Jack and the man paused to let each other be the first to mail his letter, and glanced up at one another.

The stranger was a young man of about thirty, attired in fashionable clothing, and had a pair of mutton-chop side whiskers.

He gave a slight start upon seeing Jack's face, and with a quick, nervous step forward he laid a small, white hand on the young inventor's arm, and said, in eager tones:

"Excuse me, but isn't your name Jack Wright?"

"It is," replied the boy, surprised at the recognition, for the speaker was an entire stranger to him.

"I thought so!" muttered the other, with a nod. "And I'm glad I met you, as I have an important piece of news for you."

Jack glanced at the stranger, with a mystified air.

He at once became suspicious of him.

"How did you know who I am?" he asked, abruptly.

"I've seen you before," replied the stranger, coolly.

"Where?"

"At Rapid City."

"I never mentioned my name to any one there."

"Oh, yes, you did—at the railroad depot where your baggage landed."

"Well, is that where you learned who I was?"

"It is."

"What do you want to tell me?"

"You publicly declared your intention there to exterminate the bandits of the Black Hills, didn't you?" insinuatingly asked the stranger.

"I do not remember saying so, but might have made such a boast."

"Do you still adhere to that intention?"

"Most assuredly."

"Then I can help you to keep your resolve."

"In what way?"

"By exposing a plot of the road agents, which I overheard to-day."

"Indeed! And what is it?"

"They intend to hold up a train from Rapid City to-night."

"Why didn't you inform the authorities instead of coming to me?"

"In the first place, because I only just discovered the plot, and in the second place, because I am one of Tom King's gang, and fear detection doing so."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAIN ROBBERY.

The candid admission of the stranger amazed Jack, and after a pause of a few moments he said to the man:

"If you are one of Tom King's gang what motive prompts you to play your friends false by betraying them to me?"

"Revenge!" hissed the stranger, with a dark scowl.

"Ah! Just as I thought!"

"The chief has wronged me. I won't say how. I swore to avenge myself. The chance has come. I know what your object is in the Black Hills, and am sure you can thwart the gang. Now, if I had gone and posted the authorities, spies of King might find out where the information came from. Do you know what the result would be?"

"Injury to you, no doubt."

"Death! Sure death!"

"They must be desperate men."

"None worse in Dakota. Informing you is safer."

"Much more so," assented Jack, to draw the fellow out.

"You would not betray where your information came from?"

"Decidedly not. But the fact is, I haven't got any as yet."

"You shall—ha! You are watched!"

"By whom?"

"A spy!" replied the man, thrusting his hands in his pocket, and slowly moving away. "The man outside the window."

"I see him," said Jack, casting a swift glance at an individual in shabby clothes, standing in the street peering in the window.

"Go up to my room—No. 61, and I'll tell you the rest," said the informer, going to the cigar counter and purchasing a Havana.

Jack carelessly walked away to the parlor where he sat down.

"That fellow seems to be in earnest!" he muttered.

A few minutes afterward he went up to Room 61 and passed in, but the stranger was not there.

Thinking that he had not come up yet, Jack was about to seat himself when he saw a sheet of note-paper pinned to the door, with his own name written on it.

Taking it down he read:

"The spy is watching me. I dare not speak to you in this vicinity, as I may be detected. The train is the 7.30 from Rapid City—the place, at Dead Man's Gulch. Destroy this note."

Jack put the note in his pocket.

"It could not have been a design to lure me into a trap alone," the boy muttered, "or he would have made an effort to prevent me going in the Avalanche."

The boy left the hotel and went to the railroad depot.

Accosting the superintendent, he asked him:

"What train is due at 7.30 to-night from Rapid City?"

"Freight and passenger," was the reply.

"Does that train carry any valuables?"

"Frequently. Why do you ask?"

"Fear of road agents."

"Bosh! They couldn't stop her, she goes so fast."

"I have reason to believe they intend to, in Dead Man's Gulch."

The superintendent laughed skeptically and shrugged his shoulders.

"Young man," said he, "you must be from the East, where exaggerated yarns about road agents in this region are swallowed every time a foot-pad knocks down a man to rob him."

"Then you don't take stock in my warning?"

"None whatever."

"And won't signal that train by telegraph to beware?"

"I can do that much, just for the sake of caution."

"Very good, sir. By so doing you may save it from Tom King's men, one of whom apprised me to-day that an attempt was to be made to hold the train up in Dead Man's Gulch."

"Can you substantiate the story?"

Jack handed him the informer's note.

"Only by this," said the boy.

The superintendent read it and smiled.

"I have no confidence in the warning," said he.

Jack was annoyed at his skepticism.

"Very well," he remarked; "use your own judgment."

"I will telegraph the warning ahead, as I told you."

The boy nodded and walked off in disgust at the thankless manner in which he had been treated.

Returning to the Avalanche he explained to his friends what had occurred.

"The miners you employed will go on to the mine, then?" queried Hopkins.

"Yes, under a good superintendent whom I engaged."

"But we must return to Bear Gulch?"

"Of course, till I get the work started."

"Shiminey Christmas!" ejaculated Fritz, who was anxious to speak while they were talking business, "dot railroad veller don't believe himselluf dot dem oudlaws vhas goin' ter dackle dot drain neider."

"He treated the matter very lightly," answered Jack.

"Och! but you vhas tink dey rob de drain?"

"I am firmly convinced that my informant told the truth."

"Den you go by der blace und make dem shtop, don't id?"

"Yes, I will run over to the gulch and see if any of the bandits are skulking about there, when supper is finished."

Fritz looked satisfied at this, for his war-like nature was appeased.

"Dunfer vetter!" he chuckled, giving Tim such a punch

in the ribs that the breath was knocked out of him and made him gasp, "now vhe vhas had some fun alretty, Dim, you oldt moon-faced morgey!"

"Belay thar!" groaned the old sailor, doubling up, and banging the Dutch boy with his wooden leg. "Blast yer timbers, yer needn't begin on my hulk! Don't yer see as ye've knocked me in ther breathin'-tackle?"

Jack glanced at his watch.

It was seven o'clock and evening twilight was falling.

The Dutch boy had their supper prepared, so they lost no time partaking of it, and during the meal laid their plans.

Dead Man's Gulch was not far from the city, and as soon as they had finished their meal the deers were put in motion and Jack steered the Avalanche for the railroad track.

Within five minutes they reached the place.

It was a wild ravine, with towering cliffs, tumbled rocks, and dense foliage, through which the railroad ran.

Not a soul was to be seen, and our friends scanned the surrounding trees, rocks and bushes with powerful glasses without observing any of the bandits there.

"Really," said Hopkins, "you must have been fooled."

"No. I've got faith in the man's story," insisted Jack, resolutely.

"But, 'pon my word, there isn't an outlaw anywhere near here."

"Let us go through the ravine and see."

The deers were started along the track, but no one was seen from one end of the gorge to the other, nor was there a hiding place in which any one was concealed.

Jack even examined the rails to see if they were broken or obstructed, without seeing anything wrong.

He was puzzled.

"If this job was not interrupted, somehow," he muttered, "the bandits have not resorted to the usual methods I have heard they employ in these parts to hold trains up."

"Wot in thunder ha' they done, then?" growled Tim.

"That remains to be seen, and—ah! Here comes the train!"

He pointed ahead, as a distant whistle blast sounded, and they all saw the glimmering headlight of the locomotive coming.

Jack brought the deers to a pause.

On came the train, rapidly, and in a few minutes it swept past the Avalanche, showing a locomotive, four freight cars and a passenger coach.

It then flashed across Jack's mind that the railroad superintendent had telegraphed the news, and thus thwarted the attempt.

"Perhaps our trip here was useless, after all!" he remarked.

"Vait vonct!" exclaimed Fritz, excitedly.

"Lor' save us! what now?" growled Tim.

"Dear me, the train is stopping!" ejaculated the professor, nervously.

Jack gave a start, clutched the wheel and grasped the lever.

"I see through it now!" he cried. "The bandits are on the train!"

The train had come to a pause in the middle of the gulch, and a tremendous uproar ensued among the passengers.

Two masked men had leaped upon the engine tender, with drawn revolvers, covered the engineer and fireman and ordered the former to stop the locomotive or die!

Each one of the brakemen found a masked man at his side, armed with a pistol, and were ordered to hold up their hands.

In the passenger coach ten men had adjusted masks, drawn pistols, and with a brace of them in their hands, menaced the conductor and passengers.

The rest of the passengers consisted of five men and a dozen ladies.

Most of the latter fainted or became hysterical with fright,

while the men turned pale and obediently raised their hands. Two of the bandits then passed from one to the other and relieved them of all their valuables.

After that, half the bandits passed into the freight and baggage cars, and selecting the baggage car safe and other things they considered worthy of stealing, they flung them from the cars.

It was all done methodically, but rapidly.

The engineer was then ordered to go ahead, and complied.

As the train sped away the thieves sprang to the ground in the gulch, and were just about to attack the train safe, trunks and parcels, when the Avalanche rushed toward them.

"Cover the rascals!" shouted Jack. "Take them all, dead or alive!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A CLEAN SWEEP.

There were twenty of the train robbers in the gang, and they glanced at the electric deers in the most intense amazement as they came rushing toward them.

None of the outlaws had ever seen Jack Wright's electric contrivance before, and consequently were very much startled.

Beside the track ran the machine, its powerful electric lights blazing like the eyes of a demon, and in a moment it reached the bandits.

Fully armed, all of Jack's friends stood in the front cage, and as the boy turned a lever, shutting off the electric current and brought the deers to a pause, he shouted:

"Hands up, every one of you, or take the consequence!"

A murmur of conversation ran among the bandits.

They now saw that the Avalanche was a mechanical affair, containing several human beings.

One of the outlaws impudently faced Jack, and demanded, gruffly:

"Say, youngster, you don't know what you're a-doin', do you?"

"Perfectly well," replied the young inventor. "I want you all to surrender, and give up that stolen property, or I'll order my friends to open fire upon you!"

"Workin' for the authorities, are you?" demanded the man.

"No—for myself!" replied Jack.

"Then get out of this, youngster, before you get hurt!"

"Do you refuse to submit?"

"Of course we do. Pepper 'em, boys, and drive 'em away!"

A dozen shots were fired at the Avalanche by the bandits at this command, but the bullets struck harmlessly against the wire cage, without injuring any of our friends.

The bandits were amazed to see what a great protection the wire work was, and before they recovered from their surprise our friends poured a terrible fire out at them through the loop-holes from their repeating arms.

Down dropped the bandits, one after another, wounded and yelling, until half of their number had fallen.

The rest kept up an incessant but useless fire.

Then they ran for the rocks and got behind them for shelter.

Jack and his friends were attired in their metallic suits.

Springing to the ground they bound the fallen men and flung them into the rear cage of the Avalanche, the bandits behind the rocks firing at them incessantly in the meantime.

Some of the rifle bullets struck the four, but failed to pierce their armor, and they finally got the last prisoner into the cage.

Jack then started the deers for the rocks, and his friends kept up an incessant fire upon the outlaws as they became exposed to view by the manoeuvres of the Avalanche.

Several more were struck.

They were hidden by their friends.

There was no way for the train robbers to retreat save to the right or left, or to screen themselves with the trees and rocks, for a high wall rose in back of them.

Every time any of them appeared they were fired at.

"I can't get at them behind those rocks, now," said Jack, presently, as he brought the deers to a pause amid a volley from the bandits. "And they dare not show themselves for fear of getting hit. But we must dislodge them, boy!"

"I tink me dot I vhas do dot," said Fritz, eagerly.

"How do you mean?"

"Och, I go me up by der lookoutt und bombard dem."

"Good! Try it, Fritz."

"Yah, und so soon dot I make me dem get ould from behint dem rocks, you sock 'em mit dem rifles alretty, hey?"

"Go ahead!" said Jack, nodding assent.

Fritz went into the turret.

Procuring some hand grenades, he went up to the cage on the turret from whence he could look down on the bandits, and opening the round windows, he began to fling the grenades down about the screened outlaws.

They burst with brilliant glares and loud reports, and the flying fragments caused the bandits to scatter.

Driven from their refuge, they fired shot after shot at the Avalanche and ran for their lives.

But Jack, Hopkins and Tim were ready for them.

"Wound without killing, if you can!" advised the boy.

They fired round after round after the flying bandits and brought several more to the ground, wounded.

Five of them got away.

There were fifteen men wounded.

Our friends soon had the injured ones bound and dragged into the rear cage with the rest.

A tumult arose among them, of curses, yells, threats and groans of pain, while our friends were direfully threatened.

When they were all gathered in, Jack viewed them and said:

"Isn't this part of Tom King's gang?"

No one answered.

"Speak!" exclaimed the boy, sternly.

Still no reply.

Jack seized one of the men by the neck, and turning an electric current into his metal glove from a battery attached to his suit, it flashed into the wretch and wrung a howl from his lips.

"Will you answer?" demanded Jack.

"Yes, yes! Le' go!" howled the man, writhing spasmodically.

"Well—isn't your crew some of King's gang?"

"Yes!" roared the man.

"I thought so," said Jack, smilingly, as he released the fellow.

"Here comes the train back," interposed Hopkins.

Jack glanced along the track and beheld a locomotive approaching from the direction of Deadwood, with one passenger coach.

In a few moments it came to a pause near the Avalanche, and a number of men alighted, armed with rifles.

It was the sheriff of Lawrence County and his posse.

They ran up to the Avalanche which stood beside the heap of stolen freight, and coming to a pause the sheriff yelled: "Surrender, or we'll fire—"

"Hold on!" cried Jack. "We ain't the thieves."

"Oh, you can't fool me!"

"But we have captured them for you," added Jack. "Look in the rear cage."

The sheriff did so and saw the prisoners.

"Say, what the mischief does this mean, anyway?" he demanded.

"Five of the gang escaped us. They are running down the gulch!" the boy answered. "Send some of your men after them with the engine and you may corral them—go quick!"

The sheriff saw that Jack was in earnest.

Ordering five of his men to do as the boy suggested, the locomotive carried them away a moment later, and the sheriff asked:

"How many of them have you got there?"

"Fifteen; and here's the safe and baggage they were stealing."

"Excellent! But say—what sort of a machine is that?"

Jack explained in a few words.

With ten men at his back the sheriff boarded the Avalanche and their astonishment knew no bounds at the appearance of Jack's metallic equipment.

"This machine is a wonder!" the sheriff exclaimed, vehemently. "You have rendered us a great favor, young man."

"How did you happen to get here so quick?" asked Jack.

"We were just going to board the cars to go after a noted desperado when the robbed train came in and the superintendent begged us to start off after the train robbers in the shuttle train that brought us here. He said he was warned of this robbery, and telegraphed the news to Rapid City, but for some reason the message was delayed and the marked train had gone ere the news got there. The result was that the robbery was consummated."

The sheriff then examined the prisoners, whom he unmasked.

To his surprise he found among them many men who posed in Deadwood as respectable citizens, and in their pockets found the valuables stolen from the passengers.

A desultory conversation ensued between them, and finally the locomotive came back with the constables and four prisoners.

The escaping bandits had been run down, shot and captured, only one of the twenty escaping.

It was a complete victory for Jack.

He was delighted.

"I've started in well," he remarked. "But I've only corralled one-fifth of the gang, and won't stop till the rest are disposed of!"

"By your leave I'll transfer the prisoners to the train," said the sheriff, "and pick up this stolen baggage to transport them to Deadwood at once."

This plan was followed, and in the interval the sheriff found out who Jack was and all about him.

When everything was in readiness they parted company.

The train ran off with the prisoners for the city, and Jack and his friends sent the deers flying from Dead Man's Gulch up to the plain again.

"We will go back to the Lost Gold Mine now," said Jack, "to protect our interests and get things in working order."

"Reclaiming that mine isn't as smooth sailing as I imagined it would be," said the professor, glumly.

"Every good sailor expects foul weather occasionally," grunted Tim.

"I tink so neider," was Fritz's assent.

CHAPTER XV.

CHASED BY A CYCLONE.

"Put on full speed, Tim—quick, or we are lost!"

"Good Lor', Jack, wot is it, lad? Ther end o' ther world a-comin'?"

"It's a cyclone; and caught in this gulch as we are, with

that awful storm coming on behind us, there is no escape but by outspeeding it!"

It was several hours after they captured the train robbers.

The Avalanche had gone down to Whitewood Cross, and was heading through one of the vast gorges at the foothills of Custer's Peak when the dark sky and high wind which had arisen necessitated all the light they could get from their electric lamps.

In back of them a frowning, black cloud had dropped in a funnel shape down from the lowering sky, and came rushing through the gorge after them with terrible velocity.

It was accompanied by an awful roaring and whistling of the wind, trees, bushes and rocks were knocked down and torn up into the air to be hurled in showers ahead of the storm.

On came the gyrating black cloud, dealing fierce destruction in its path, and the Avalanche dashed ahead in the gloomy gorge, the bottom of which was very rough, rocky and uneven.

It was near the hour of midnight.

Everything was dark and gloomy, rain was pouring down in torrents, and they had to depend wholly on the searchlights, the glare from which shone mistily through the humid air.

Away rushed the deers, with Tim at the steering wheel, and Jack in the rear cage watching the storm pursuing them.

Fritz and Hopkins had gone up in the turret and turned in, but the tremendous rattling and jolting of the wagon aroused them and brought them down, half dressed, to find out what the trouble was.

It was a race for life between the Avalanche and the cyclone, for if the storm overtook the machine in the gorge it was bound to tear it to pieces as easily as it did every obstruction in its way.

"Ach, du lieber Gott!" groaned Fritz. "Vhas der sky busted?"

"We are lost!" gasped Hopkins, turning deathly pale.

"Stop your snivelin'," roared Tim, angrily, "an' len' us a hand."

"Vot iss?" queried Fritz, darting into the front cage as fast as his ponderous stomach would let him. "Could I helb you vonct?"

"Stay here on lookout!" growled the old sailor. "I've only got one eye, dash it, an' I can't keep it lookin' ahead, watchin' ther wheel when I turns it, cocked on ther gauges, an' fastened on ter ther levers all at ther same time, can I?"

"Hey! Look out! Dere vhas a stream ahet!" interposed Fritz.

The deers had plunged splashingly into it, and Tim twisted the wheel around, hauling the steel reins on the left-hand side as tight as a bowstring, whereupon the near deers swung around, dragging the others, and changed their course.

Skirting the edge of the stream, the Avalanche shot ahead on a spur that ran along the side of the cliff.

In a moment the bed of the ravine was left below them, and they were flying along a ledge that sloped upward, which soon brought them high above the stream.

All this time the roaring storm cloud had kept on in hot pursuit, but so fast traveled the deers that it failed to gain any on the flying Avalanche.

Just then Jack rushed into the front cage.

"Where are you taking us?" he asked, in surprise.

"Ther hold o' ther ravine wuz flooded," answered Tim, "an' I had ter veer off on ther port tack by follyin' this ledge."

The boy gave a violent start.

He saw that they were in a very perilous position.

If the cyclone overtook them now it could easily sweep them from the ledge down from that dizzy height, to be smashed to death on the rocks one hundred feet below.

Jack flashed the rays of the searchlight far ahead and saw that the ledge looked dangerous, as it narrowed in some places so that it seemed as if the vehicle could not run over it without the wheels on one side going off the edge.

Besides, there were protuberances jutting from the side of the cliff, in places the bed was crumbled and broken, and it was rolling and rough from beginning to end.

Yet there was no retreat.

They could not turn around and go back.

"I'm afraid we are in a perilous position!" the boy remarked.

"Here—you take ther wheel," said Tim, nervously.

"Vhas ve got ter go ahet so fast like dis?" queried Fritz.

"If we don't the cyclone will overtake us," replied Jack.

Their danger would not have seemed so terrible if they could have advanced cautiously; but to go on, pell-mell, as they were, with every prospect of certain death ahead, was appalling.

Yet no other course was open.

Even Tim and Fritz were unnerved by the ordeal.

There was something extraordinary in Jack's coolness of nerve in the face of such terrible danger, for he did not flinch.

He looked the situation squarely in the face.

He handled the wheel without a tremor.

"Don't weaken, boys!" he said, in calm, cheerful tones. "This is no time to give way to nervousness. You need all your courage now more than at any time!"

His words acted like magic.

They all cheered up wonderfully.

The deers ran on, the wagon swaying and jolting, and Jack kept his keen, watchful glance fastened on the dangerous road ahead and steered the deers with amazing skill.

There were times when a jutting rock was struck with a shock like thunder, knocking the wagon over so close to the edge that the dirt began to crumble away from beneath the wheels.

Ere the wagon could lose its balance the boy by a dexterous turn brought it inward on solid rock again.

At other times the path narrowed so that once there was only half of the broad wheels on ground, the other half hanging over the edge, and the hubs of the inner wheels scraping the wall, but the boy recovered solid ground before they were precipitated down into the dark gulf.

Throughout the trip they were rocked, jolted, shaken and slammed about, but the boy did not relax speed for an instant, as the pursuing cyclone was less than half a mile behind them.

On, on, on through the darkness and storm they fled, mounting higher and higher, inch by inch, the devastating cyclone roaring in pursuit.

But at last they came to the top of the cliff, and with hearts thumping hard with delight, faces glowing with smiles and sighs of relief on their lips, our friends were out of danger.

Jack drove the deers away over the level country, and the cyclone swept by at the back of the wagon, and was soon lost in the far distance.

"Eureka!" ejaculated the boy, slackening the speed of the deers.

"Such coolness and courage I never saw before!" enthusiastically cried the professor.

"Waal, I'll allow as that 'ere cyclone wuz a terror," said Tim, with a grin, "but 'tain't nothin' like ther tornado I got zetched in aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash in ther West Indies. Why sir, it jeet bore down on us at eighty-five knots hour an' takin' us by ther beam, laid us over on our lee side, an'—"

"Drowned you I presume?" asked Hopkins, sarcastically. "Be yer no?" said Tim, taking a chew of navy plug. "It

driv our ship under ther sea fer two full minutes, clipped ther water off of her wot wuz a-bearin' her down, squatted it up in ther air, an' passin' on, lef' us a-floating as if nuthin' had happened!"

Fritz picked up his old accordion and began to play a mournful tune in a hideous key, much to Tim's disgust, and set Whiskers howling and Bismarck screeching so hard that Jack had to tell him to stop.

The deers ran ahead over a broad plateau, heading for the northwest at the base of the mountain, and finally came to a grove of trees, where Jack brought the machine to a pause.

On the following morning the storm had all cleared off, leaving the ground damp and spongy, but the sky was blue and the sun shone down brightening everything up.

There was a road not far from where the deers stood, leading to Bear Gulch, and when breakfast was concluded, Jack was about to send the deers out on the road to follow it, when Fritz came aboard and in breathless tones said:

"Dere vhas some mens on horses comin' along vonet."

"Then we will stay here till they pass so we can see who they are," replied Jack, glancing out in the direction Fritz indicated.

In a few moments the horsemen appeared.

There were three of them.

One was evidently an Englishman in tourist's costume, with a pair of side whiskers on his fat face, and eye-glasses on his Roman nose; the other, in a plaid suit and derby, his red-headed valet, and the third person wore a stylish suit of corduroys.

They were all mounted on fine horses.

The moment Jack's glance fell upon the man in corduroys he gave a violent start, and exclaimed:

"As I live, it's Keno Bob, the bandit chief's lieutenant!"

"Up to mischief, too, with those travelers, I'll be bound!" remarked the professor, in grim tones.

Fritz seized a rifle and raised it to his shoulder.

"Shiminey Christmas!" said he. "Let me soak him!"

"No; wait!" said Jack. "I want to find out first what he's up to."

CHAPTER XVI.

FOUR SIOUX INDIANS.

Keno Bob and his two English-looking companions were evidently following the road for Bear Gulch, and were keeping up a loud and careless conversation.

Screened among the trees the Avalanche was well hidden and as the three drew near the boy heard the bandit say:

"Lord Ashley, the Lost Gold Mine is the greatest in Dakota, and was just claimed by a fellow from the East named Jack Wright. You will find that I am telling the truth when you reach the settlement."

"Yes," replied the man with side whiskers, drawlingly. "I presume so. Fact is, though, I'm here for sport. Hunting buffaloes, you know. Still, if I can buy a good gold mine reasonably enough, I don't object. You say it's a good one, do you?"

"As the vein is located near the Lost Gold Mine claim I and my partner are sure it is a continuation of that wonderful claim. As we haven't got money enough to work it, we are anxious to sell—that's all."

"Ah, I see! Denced awkward to be poor, I assure you—eh, Tompkins—denced awkward, isn't it?"

"Yes, my lord!" replied Tompkins, who never said anything else.

By this time the three riders passed out of hearing, and with a smile on his face Jack turned to his friends and said:

"The sooner we get to Bear Gulch the better, boys. The men I engaged at Deadwood to mine the claim will be there, and we must get them operating."

"Wot d'yer make o' wot Keno Bob jest said?" queried Tim.

"Why, it looks to me as if the rascal has salted a mine and has caught a fool to buy it. We will try to save Lord Ashley's money by thwarting those rascals."

And starting the deers along the base of Custer's Peak he headed for Bear Gulch on the other side of the mountain, in the bright, sunny morning.

In order to try and trap others of King's band besides Keno Bob in the treacherous game Jack saw they were going to play, the boy resolved to let him go unmolested with the Englishman for the present.

On a tributary of Water Creek, running from the north fork of the Cheyenne River, stands a settlement called Englewood, nestling among the hills, toward which Jack headed the deers.

He knew there were bridges there spanning the stream which he would have to cross to reach Bear Gulch beyond it, otherwise he would have had to go far out of his way on a detour.

The consequence was that they lost sight of Keno Bob's party.

It was rugged traveling for the Avalanche when she got among the hills, but there were several well-defined trails easy to follow, and the boy in a few hours was near his goal.

Passing into a wood of pines a fine deer sprang across their path, and the boy brought the machine to a pause.

"Game!" he remarked, grasping a rifle. "I cannot resist a shot at that beautiful buck. Wait till I return, boys."

He left the Avalanche and plunged into the woods.

It was easy to follow the deer's trail, and the boy cautiously went on in pursuit, holding his rifle in readiness for a shot.

In this manner he got quite a distance from the Avalanche, and emerged into a beautiful glen, bordered on one side by the marshy banks of the stream they had to go over.

Here the water was dammed up by a number of busy beavers, which might easily have been trapped.

The solitude was broken by the tuneful voices of many birds, and the green foliage was resplendent with sunshine.

Upon the bank of the stream stood the handsome buck, wading ankle-deep in the mire and stooping over to drink.

Jack paused with an admiring glance at the scene, and then raised his weapon and fired at the deer.

While the report of the explosive bullet was still lingering on the balmy air, he was startled to see an arrow fly out of an adjacent thicket, plunge into the deer just as the ball killed it, and stick there.

"Where did that come from?" muttered Jack.

He did not see any one, and starting from behind a tree where he stood he ran for the deer to bleed it, when out of the thicket dashed several Sioux Indians and ran for the same object.

Jack did not see them at once.

He reached the deer first, and bent over it.

Withdrawing his hunting-knife he was just about to begin operations upon the deer when a hand grasped his shoulder, and, slightly startled, he glanced up and around.

Behind him stood one of the Indians.

He held a tomahawk upraised in readiness to bring it down upon Jack's skull, when the boy bounded to his feet and recoiled from the brave, exclaiming, breathlessly:

"Hulloa! What does this mean?"

The warrior said something in his own language, for he could not understand Jack any more than the boy comprehended him.

There were three more of the redskins, and while the

leader was addressing Jack, they deliberately walked over to the deer, and lifting the carcass up, walked away with it. Jack's anger arose.

He had killed the deer ere the Indians fired.

Consequently he resented their taking possession of it.

With a frown on his face he sprang toward the savages who held his prize, and exclaimed:

"Say, drop that; it's mine!"

A guttural volley of ejaculations pealed from the braves, and the hand of every one flew to the hilts of the weapons displayed in their buckskin belts, in a threatening manner.

"Ugly, eh?" remarked Jack, angrily, as he recoiled a step.

The Indians scowled, and, withdrawing their weapons, brandished them at the intrepid boy, and made some unknown remarks.

It was possible they were threats.

Jack was in nowise intimidated by them, however, for he raised his rifle to his shoulder, and, covering the savages in a very threatening manner, he exclaimed:

"Two can play at that game! Now you drop that deer. My bullet killed it, so it's mine. If you don't, I'll drop you!"

It seemed as if the Sioux understood him, for they complied; but no sooner were they relieved of the carcass when they all rushed toward the boy as if to annihilate him.

Jack realized in an instant that his life was in danger, for the savages evidently meant to murder him for the deer, under the belief that their crime would never be discovered in that lonely spot.

The boy had some experience with redskins before. Consequently he did not hesitate to fire at them, point blank. Before any of the four could reach him he shot them down.

They yelled with pain, and, wounded and fallen as they were, hurled their tomahawks and scalping knives at him in a shower.

Jack had the utmost difficulty in dodging these missiles, but he managed to escape the bombardment with a trifling cut.

Every one of the savages were so wounded that they could not do him much harm, and he coolly picked up the deer, which was not too heavy to be carried, slung it over his shoulder, and lugged it away.

The wounded braves were left on the ground yelling at him, but paying no further attention to them the plucky boy made his way back to the Avalanche.

Here he related to his friends what occurred, and after the deer was prepared for use and taken aboard, they continued their journey.

Half an hour afterward they arrived in sight of Englewood and found a rude bridge of planks by which they crossed the stream.

The settlement was a small, unimportant collection of miners' shanties with very few people in them, and they passed it by without paying any attention to the amazed settlers.

In due time Bear Gulch was reached.

Here Jack found the miners, superintendent and tools awaiting, which he had sent on from Deadwood, and leaving his friends in the Avalanche, which was at a standstill at Hank Busby's store, the boy gathered his men and gave them their final instructions.

They were to go on to the mine and begin operations at once, and he promised to join them there that night.

By the time these details were attended to it was mid-day and the boy left his men to go back to the Avalanche.

As he was passing down the main street he saw three horsemen come into the settlement and enter a saloon.

They were Keno Bob, Lord Ashley and Tompkins.

A look of satisfaction overspread Jack's face.

"The outlaw don't know yet how we cleaned out King's gang," he muttered, as he hastened toward the saloon, "and

will be very much amazed when he sees me drop in on you."

Upon reaching the saloon, Jack entered.

Glancing around, he saw no signs of the men he sought, but going up to the bar he ordered a drink, and asked the proprietor:

"What became of the three people who just came in?"

"They went into the back room for privacy, Mr. Wright," answered the saloonkeeper, respectfully.

"Do you stand in with King's gang?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, the fellow in corduroys is his lieutenant, and I am going into that room and nail him!" said Jack.

CHAPTER XVII.

SIX SHOOTER PASSES IN HIS CHIPS.

At the back of the saloon was a small room, mostly used for card playing, the door of which was closed and locked.

As Jack drew near the door he heard the hum of voices in the apartment, and to his surprise recognized that of Tom King among them, although he did not know that the bandit was in there.

Returning to the bar he asked the proprietor:

"Who was in that room when the trio just went in?"

"Nobody that I know of," replied the man.

"But I just heard King's voice there?"

"The deuce you say!" was the surprised rejoinder.

"Fact. How did he get in there?"

"Very likely by the back door leading into the yard."

"Don't let on then that I'm watching them, will you?"

"Of course not, Mr. Wright."

Jack went out the front door, with the intention of going round to the back entrance, to the rear room.

He had hardly passed from the saloon when his quick glance fell upon the figure of a man crouching behind the angle of a building across the street, as if in hiding.

The next moment a gleaming revolver was thrust out from behind the house, there came a flash, a report, and a bullet grazed Jack's head, gashing his scalp.

Startled, the boy uttered a suppressed cry.

"An assassin!" he exclaimed, vehemently.

The next instant he had a pistol drawn, dashed out into the middle of the street, saw the man, and fired.

An explosion followed.

This was succeeded by a cry of pain.

"Roarin' catamounts!" yelled the man, falling to the ground. "I'm plugged! Oh, goldurn me fer a blamed fool fer tryin' ter squar up by shootin' aroun' ther side of a house!"

"Six-Shooter Sam!" exclaimed Jack, recognizing him.

He ran over to the fallen rascal, who fortunately had dropped his revolver, and now lay writhing with agony.

"Don't fire!" roared the wretch, in tones of dread, as he glanced up at the boy who still clutched his revolver. "Hully gee! don't ye see as thar ain't enough life lef' in me ter stuff a buzzard?"

"I ain't going to fire. You got enough to last you the rest of your life with the shot I just gave you," replied Jack.

"Blowed a lung clean outen me!" groaned the outlaw.

"I never miss my aim, Six Shooter!" coolly replied Jack.

The bandit had received the explosive ball in his side and coolly thought he was not long for this mundane sphere.

He seemed to feel the fact keenly, too, for he said:

"I reckon a I've got my last pill."

"And I am sure of it," answered Jack.

Just then several people rushed up to the spot, attracted

by the sounds of the firing, and upon seeing who it was Jack had knocked over, they openly expressed their satisfaction.

"He got away from the gallers onct," said one, "an' he near had us all perforated, but he's got it in the neck now, fer sure!"

"Say—ain't I a-goin' ter croak?" anxiously asked the wounded man.

"You won't last an hour," replied Jack, examining the wound.

"Oh, Lord! I d'wanter die!

"There's no saving you!"

Six Shooter began to cry.

He was afraid of death.

"Why didn't I stay in ther cave?" he whined.

"What cave?" asked Jack. "Near the blasted oak?"

"Yair. Whar thet powder magazine wuz planted."

"Is that where the gang lives?" quickly asked Jack.

"O' course! Didn't ye know that afore?"

"I know it now, and I'll turn it inside out presently!"

"Ginime a glass o' whisky, will ye?"

"No; it will probably prolong your life," answered Jack.

"Waal, gosh blame it, that's jist what I want!" yelled Sam.

"I'll give it to you, conditionally," said the boy, drawing a flask from his pocket.

"Whut's ther conditions?" eagerly asked the wounded man.

"You must truthfully answer all my questions."

"All right. As long's I'm done fer, I don't mind."

"First, tell me what you know about the plan to sell Lord Ashley a mine close to my claim," said Jack.

"So yer knows about that, do yer?"

"Yes. It's a salted mine, ain't it?"

"Waal, I reckon. King hearn tell o' ther Englishman who wuz at Rapid City, an' put Keno Bob up ter hookin' on ter him. They loaded a gun wi' gold an' blowed a dozen charges inter a crack in ther quartz, nigh onto your claim."

"I thought as much."

"Keno hed instructions ter fetch Ashley here and buy it."

"Is that all?"

"I don't know no more about it. Whar's the whisky?" Jack gave him some, and it seemed to revive his spirits.

The boy was practicing a deep deception upon the bandit, in order to find out all he wanted to know, and when Six Shooter was stimulated, he said to him:

"That drink is as good as five hours more life to you, and another drink would add five additional to it, my friend."

"Why in blazes don't you give it to me, then?" groaned the bandit.

"Because I want more information."

"Wot about?"

"Dick Fleetwood's find of the Lost Gold Mine."

"I knowed Dick werry well, I did."

"Do you know why he failed to register his claim to the mine?"

"Waal, I reckon."

"Then, why didn't he do it?"

"'Cause he dassent. He wuz a-goin' ter do it, when a miner ran inter camp an' said he'd seen Dick at his claim, murder his partner by puttin' a bullet in his furred!"

Jack was startled.

Fleetwood's secret was exposed.

The boy recalled to mind the skeleton he had found where the gold lay in the cavern, and at once surmised that it must have been the remains of Fleetwood's partner.

"Shot his partner!" he exclaimed, in startled tones.

"Blowed him ter glory!" asserted Six Shooter.

"Why?"

"So's ter ha' ther claim all ter hisself."

"I see."

"Dick then shot ther man dead wot gave him away, an' fled."

"So that's why he never registered his claim?"

"Jess so. If he'd a-stayed yar in this camp he'd a-been lynched."

"Tom King pursued Fleetwood, then?"

"All over. Ther chief knowed as ther claim wouldn't be no good ter Fleetwood, an' wanted ter buy it. Dick refused. Then Tom tried ter find out whar it wuz, an' follererd him all over, till he ran Dick down, and let daylight throw him."

"Where is the rest of the gang now?"

"Scattered all over."

"Does King intend to contest my work on the mine?"

"I dunno."

Jack turned to the group of people surrounding them.

"I'm through with this scoundrel now," said he.

"Tried to down ye, didn't he?" queried one of them.

"He made an effort to assassinate me."

A murmur of indignation ran through the crowd and they bent angry, scowling glances upon the wretch.

"His wound," continued Jack, "is trifling—a mere flesh cut."

"Wot! Ain't I done fer?" yelled Six Shooter.

"Not by that shot I gave you. I'll leave you at the mercy of these citizens, most of whom I see are regulators, as I've got other work to attend to. It remains with them whether they finish hanging you. Gentlemen, I wish you good afternoon."

And, so saying, Jack walked away.

Six Shooter sprang to his feet.

"He's duped me!" he raved, wildly.

Before he could say any more the crowd closed in on him and a fierce struggle ensued among them.

When Six-Shooter Sam was seen by the rest of the citizens of Bear Gulch that afternoon he was hanging by the neck from a rope tied to the branch of a tree, and there was not enough life left in his body to move a muscle!

Jack started for the back of the saloon where he had left Lord Ashley in Keno Bob's hands, and peered in a window.

But during his absence the birds had flown.

The room was empty.

Going in and addressing the saloonkeeper, the boy was informed that the occupants of the room had consumed several drinks and then had probably gone out the back way.

Jack was disgusted.

"They can have but one destination," the boy muttered, as he left the saloon, and proceeded toward Hank Busby's grocery store. "The schemers have doubtless steered their victim for the salted mine, to show it to him, and secure his money for it. If I expect to thwart their little game I must get aboard of the Avalanche and pursue them as quickly as possible, or they will have their bird plucked."

He soon reached the electric deers, went aboard and told his companions what occurred.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

Jack drove the deers to the gulch without seeing any sign of his enemies, and found all the miners there busily engaged at putting up their quarters and preparing their stores and machinery.

Leaving instructions with Hopkins and the superintendent, Jack armed himself and started off with Tim to locate King's salted mine.

"Six-Shooter Sam told me it was near our claim," said the boy, "so we won't have very far to go to find them, but in what direction they have their fraudulent lead located, I don't know."

"Ye kin rattle my lower riggin'!" exclaimed Tim, "if it'll be hard ter shape our course, 'cause it's easy ter locate a muskrat by its smell!"

"Should we run across them," cautioned Jack, as they passed out of the gulch. "be careful not to say or do anything till I tell you."

"Aye, aye, lad, depend on me!" replied Tim. "I'm too old a man-o'-war's man ter need sich adwice. I ain't been in ther navy fightin' fer ther Stars an' Stripes fer nuthin', I kin tell ye."

"No, offense, Tim; I only cautioned you so as to give myself a chance to find out all the rascals are up to ere we tackle them."

"I know," replied Tim, with a nod, as he stumped along and blinked his watery eye. "When I sights 'em I'll reeve my forestay through a outer sheave in ther flyin' jib-boom, an' haul up through a fair leader on ther forecastle, my lad."

Jack had determined on making a circuit, and they went up the side of a rocky hill, leading to the crest of the cliffs.

"This route will bring us in back of the mine we are working," said the boy, "and as it is the most likely place to look for our enemies, we did well to come this way."

"Couldn't navigate ther deers up here, nohow," said Tim.

"By no means. It is just as well for us to explore the surroundings of the mine, anyway, first as last, for I have no doubt that it will be a long stay we will have of it here."

"I allers believes in takin' yer bearin's, my lad," replied the old sailor, squinting around. "It's every navigator's duty. D'yer know what happened ter me onct fer failin' ter do so when I wuz quartermaster o' ther good ole frigate Wabash, while cruisin' off Chiny?"

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Jack, in dismay, "he's going to spring one of his whoppers on me. I may as well humor him, though, for the sake of good nature," then he asked aloud:

"What, Tim?"

"I runned ther ship aground!" said Tim, impressively.

"Horrible!" said Jack, feigning great dismay over the fact.

"I knowed as I'd git blazes if I wuz found out," said Tim, warming up to his yarn, "so wot d'yer think I done?"

"Didn't any one see what happened?"

"Lor', no!" promptly answered Tim, glowingly. "All the dog-watch wuz asleep, an' ther sentry had gone below, sick, just then. So I ups an' gets over ther spare topmasts on one side, an' ther jib-boom on t'other. Then I furled sails, downed topgallant yards, sent to'gallant masts ter ther deck, laic' out ther bower anchor an' heaved away—"

"Hold on, Tim—that is too much!"

"Wot?" queried the old sailor, in surprise.

"Did you do all those things unaided?"

Tim thought of what he said for a moment, and became embarrassed.

So embarrassed, in fact, that he did not know what to reply.

"Didn't the crew below hear the ship or feel its shock going aground?" remorselessly demanded Jack, in order to crush him.

Still no reply from Tim.

"Wait," advised Jack. "Don't work off any more of that yarn on me. Tell it to Hank Busby—he don't know as much about the weight of the things you handled as I do, and as he is blissfully ignorant of the amount of labor and number of men necessary to do all you did when you ran the Wabash ashore."

"Don't yer b'l'i've wot I'm tellin' yer?" growled Tim, guiltily.

"No—bluntly, no."

"Then yer needn't!"

The old liar maintained a sulky silence after that and chewed up his tobacco so fine that every time he spit he had to take a fresh chew, as he liquidized all he masticated.

They reached the top of the cliffs presently and entered a grove of trees that was overgrown with vines and bushes, and filled with dark, outcropping rocks all over.

A few steps into the copse were taken when suddenly they heard the murmur of several voices ahead of them. Coming to a pause, Jack held up his hand.

"Hark!" he whispered. "There they are now, Tim."

"Whar?" growled the ancient mariner, peering around. "Ahead of us, somewhere."

They noted that the speakers were stationary, and stole forward as cautiously as Indians to locate them.

A short walk brought them to a heap of rocks, among which King's party stood, and, peering around a huge boulder, they saw the party they were in search of.

It was made up of King, Keno Bob, Lord Ashley and Tompkins, and they were grouped around a fissure in the rocks, at which the bandit chief was pointing and saying:

"Lead's here, Ashley. Examine it. Find it's all we represented. More gold in this region than any one'd suppose."

"Yes," assented the Englishman, drawlingly. "Great country. I'll examine the lead, don't you know, and see what I think of it. Down in this crevice is the dock, do you say?"

"Look and see for yourself, my lord."

"I shall. Tompkins, give me my glass."

"Yes, my lord," replied the red-headed valet.

"Assist me to kneel, Tompkins."

"Yes, my lord."

The Englishman got down in the crevice and carefully examined the salted lead by the aid of Tompkins.

He soon found that the quartz was thickly coated with gold, and picking up a detached piece he arose and smelled it.

"Really, this is queer," said he. "It has the flavor of gunpowder."

"Oh, that's from the blasting we did to find the lead," insinuated Keno Bob, glibly. "Now, you have chosen a good specimen, why don't you take it to Deadwood for assay, and if the quartz don't pan out at least fifty dollars to the ton you needn't buy."

"I shall," replied the Englishman. "Here, Tompkins!"

"Yes, my lord."

"Take this specimen."

"Yes, my lord."

The minion took it, and the Englishman got out of the rift.

"I'll go to Deadwood now," said he.

"Wait," interposed King. "Can't let you get off that way. If you want us to hold the lead, give us a deposit."

"'Pon honor, is that the regular mode of operation?"

"Always. Your note or check will do."

"But what security will I have for it?"

"Our receipt."

"Oh, no, that won't do. Suppose I wish to back out?"

"Your check will be refunded."

"I won't be sure of that. Have you a bank account?"

"Yes," replied King.

"Then give me your check in exchange as a guarantee of good faith. Half the amount I post will do."

The two schemers conferred a moment, and King then said:

"You put up two thousand dollars and I'll post one."

"Quite agreeable," assented Ashley. "Tompkins!"

"Yes, my lord."

"My check-book and a stylographic pen."

"Yes, my lord."

Tompkins handed them over.

The innocent, trusting Englishman wrote a check, and King likewise, also giving Ashley a receipt.

After a few words more the Englishman having made arrangements with the plotters, went off with his servant.

He had hardly gone when King glanced at his check, gave a violent start, and ripped out a terrible expletive.

"We've been duped!" he hissed.

"What!" gasped Keno Bob.

"The bank this check is drawn on failed last month."

"Holy mackerel!"

"And he has got our good check."

"By George!"

"And see—the check is signed Pug Ashley!"

"What! The noted confidence sharp—"

"Exactly!"

The biters were bitten!

They glanced helplessly at each other a moment and swore.

"Follow him!" exclaimed King, savagely. "Stop him! My check is a good one. He can collect against it. His paper isn't worth a cent. Who ever dreamed we could be so easily fooled?"

They started to pursue the English crook, who had thus gained the best of them, when Jack and Tim bounded into view.

Confronting the beaten rascals, they brought them to a pause.

King and his friend recoiled.

Covering them with their weapons, Jack and Tim drew a bead on the astonished scoundrels, and the boy exclaimed:

"Halt!"

"Jack Wright!" gasped King.

"Hands up, or we fire!"

"Lost!" groaned Keno Bob.

They both raised their trembling hands over their heads.

CHAPTER XIX.

ATTACKING THE BANDITS' STRONGHOLD.

Jack and the old sailor now had the two bandits at a great disadvantage, and drawing a pistol the boy covered both of them and said to Tim:

"Disarm them."

"Aye, aye, lad!"

"Then tie their wrists behind their backs."

"Aye, now, that I will."

King and his friend turned pale.

They dared not move, for fear Jack would send a bullet crashing through their brains, and Tim hobbled over to them.

In a few moments he deprived them of their weapons and taking their belts he bound their arms behind their backs with all the skill sailors are noted for.

They were then rendered utterly helpless.

"Double misfortune!" exclaimed King, bitterly. "First we are done out of a thousand dollars, now we are captives."

"Don't give way," said Keno Bob. "We may escape yet." King shook his head gloomily.

"My lucky star is waning," said he, huskily. "Ever since Jack Wright has been on my trail I have felt it."

"You are superstitious," commented Keno Bob.

"Perhaps. My impressions come true, though."

Jack and Tim took possession of their weapons.

"March!" said the young inventor, authoritatively.

The two desperate prisoners walked on, Jack in the lead and Tim bringing up the rear.

In this manner they went back to Jack's camp and surprised every one with their prisoners.

One of the supply wagons was going back to Bear Gulch, and Jack put the two men in it and instructed Fritz to bring the prisoners to Deadwood and have them locked up.

The Dutch boy started an hour afterward, and Jack busied

himself with his new superintendent with whom he had a long conversation.

It was found that the lead was a much richer one than was at first suspected, and several of the miners came in with reports that news of the location of the claim had spread.

Prospectors were flocking all about that vicinage and claim after claim was staked that night.

On the following day a small settlement sprang up and work begun in earnest at Camp Wright, as it was called.

Late in the afternoon Fritz came flying back from Bear Gulch on horseback, in a great state of excitement.

"King vhas escabed!" he yelled, as he came thundering into camp, arousing everybody's alarm.

Jack heard him, and ran up to the Dutch boy.

"King escaped?" he cried, in dismay. "How?"

"Och, Gott! I don'd know me dot," groaned Fritz. "I vhas sittin' mit dot drifer all de way to Pear Gulch, und when ve gotted dere I look me by der vagon und King vhas gone."

"Slipped away during the trip from here?"

"Yah—I tink so."

"And Keno Bob?"

"I vhas' got him in Deadwood brison."

"Don't you know how King got rid of his bonds?"

"Nein. But I guess so dot Bob vhaft chew open de knots."

"Very likely. It's too bad, I'm sure."

"Should I vhas go und hunt for him?"

"No. It won't do any good. He is far away by this time."

"Vot a shackass I vhas alretty. Vill somepody kick me all aroundt der gamp for mine foolishness!" wailed Fritz.

"Certainly," said Tim. "I'm accommodatin'."

And so saying he caught Fritz a terrific kick with his wooden peg that knocked the remorseful Dutch boy sprawling.

Down went Fritz into a bush, with an angry roar, amid the laughter of all the onlookers.

He soon arose, sputtering with rage, danced up to Tim and shaking his pudgy fists in the old sailor's face, he roared:

"Vot dit yer do dot for, alretty?"

"Didn't yer ask me ter?" grinned Tim.

"Not you. I meant somepody else."

"Then why didn't yer say so?"

"Ach Himmel! I pull me your nose off!"

"Veer off, now," advised Tim, "or I'll kick yer again."

Jack now interposed between them, creating peace, and closely questioned him about the matter, when he got more details.

In order to prosecute Keno Bob it was necessary for the boy to appear in court at Deadwood the next day.

"I will leave the professor here in charge of the mine, then," said the boy, "and you and Tim can go with me in the Avalanche. We will start for Bear Gulch in an hour, and see if we can root out any of the bandits from their retreat among the rocks near the blasted oak, where they tried to hang Six-Shooter Sam the other day."

"Ther deers are ready now," said Tim.

"Vell, den I oxamine der batteries, und if everydings vhas retty soon, I will led yer know," added Fritz.

"In the meantime," said Jack, "I'll see to getting some provisions aboard of her for the trip."

With this arrangement they separated.

Within the specified time everything was arranged, and leaving Hopkins to guard their interests at the mine, they boarded the Avalanche.

Fritz had replenished the batteries with chemicals and the boy drove the deers from the camp.

They passed from the gulch and away the deers raced for the settlement just as the sun went down.

Upon reaching the settlement Jack found the place in a furor of excitement, for the news of the Lost Gold Mine

being found had attracted hundreds of treasure-seekers there from all parts of the State.

It was evident that there was going to be a rush for the gold fields, and Jack was delighted at the prospect, for the more people there were at Camp Wright the safer his interests would be.

"The settlement will spring up like a mushroom," he told Tim as they ran the deers into Hank Busby's barn.

When Jack got out on the street he discovered that prospector after prospector had come into town from the region of his mine with reports of having struck it rich, to register their claims.

The excitement increased as these reports flew around.

In the midst of the excitement a troop of cavalry from one of the reservations came into the settlement.

They had been pursuing a band of outlaws from the outskirts of Deadwood, but the rascals had given them the slip in the hills.

The lieutenant in command of the troops was introduced to Jack, of whose performances in suppressing the outlaws he had heard.

They met in Hank's store, and the boy said to the officer:

"I can show you where the bandits are hidden if you wish to continue your pursuit of them. In fact, I came here principally to oust them from their rendezvous, and will lead the charge on them if you will co-operate with me against them."

"There is nothing would afford me greater pleasure," replied the officer.

"Good! Let us then arrange a plan of action, Mr. Hardy." "With all my heart, Mr. Wright."

They conferred together for some time, and when their plans were all laid the young lieutenant said, smilingly:

"This shall be my last active service for some time, as I have my discharge, and upon my return to headquarters it is my intention to give up the army, go East and settle in business."

"You will have your hands full, then," replied Jack, "for if no one but myself has done away with Tom King's gang, there must be seventy-five left. Most of them, I believe, are located near this town, and as they are under subordinate leaders, we won't have such a hard tussle as if they had such consummate generals to direct them as King and Keno Bob have been."

Half an hour afterward Jack and his two friends boarded the Avalanche and left the town in it, going in the direction of the blasted oak, where the lynching had taken place.

Night had fallen, clear and moonlit.

Within a short time our friends, fully armed and prepared for a hard struggle, arrived among the rocks near the bandits' cavern, when several keen-eyed sentries, hidden among the boulders, saw them.

The sharp reports of their rifles pealed out, and the singing bullets clicked against the invulnerable sides of the Avalanche without doing its inmates any harm.

Jack and his friends then armed themselves with a number of extra powerful hand grenades and mounted to the top of the cage.

They saw numbers of the bandits going in and out of the cavern, and began to fling the grenades at the rocks.

Every time the bombs struck there came a terrific report, and the splintered rock flew in all directions, like hail.

By persistently firing at the cavern they were rapidly demolishing the front wall, when the bandits took alarm and all swarmed out.

Nearly all the band happened to be at headquarters, and they fired volley after volley of rifle and pistol shots at the daring crew of the Avalanche, their metallic suits standing the pounding with wonderful strength and durability.

Had they not worn them our friends would have been rescued.

As soon as Jack saw that he had driven all the outlaws from their stronghold, he blew a shrill blast on a whistle as a signal to the soldiers, who were concealed near by, and they came rushing among the rocks.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SUICIDE.

"The victory is ours!"

"Hurray for Sherman!"

"Belay thar, an' yell for America!"

Thus spoke Jack and his friends an hour afterward.

In brief, after a hard fight, our friends and the soldiers had beaten the bandits, but it was a fatal conflict, for not one of the troops or outlaws had escaped wounds, and several on both sides were killed outright.

There were sixty of the outlaws taken prisoners.

Indeed, the whole gang was now broken up, for the few that were absent could do but little harm to the community.

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Hardy," said Jack, descending from the Avalanche, and shaking hands with the handsome young lieutenant; "you will leave the army with a splendid—a brilliant record!"

"I owe this victory to you," replied the lieutenant.

"Not in the least. Your men did nobly—you, grandly—I merely assisted."

"Mr. Wright, you are too modest and unassuming."

"There is a \$5,000 reward offered by the Governor for the extermination of this gang. You have earned it. The money will be a good wind-up to your career as an active career. I wish you joy."

"Allow me to relinquish all claim to it in your favor."

"By no means. I am amply rewarded by aiding to get rid of those pests in human form from the Black Hills. Moreover, I am part owner of one of the richest gold mines in Dakota, and besides that, am wealthy enough, so the money is no object to me."

"In that case, I will gladly accept it," said Hardy. "I am not very well off. My parents are farmers. They have a grasping enemy who threatens to turn them out if they do not pay off the mortgage on the old homestead by next month. This five thousand dollars will save them, thank God!"

Jack was touched by the unselfish thoughtfulness of this dutiful son, who so highly prized the comfort of his old parents.

"You deserve it," said the boy, feelingly.

A shadow settled over the young lieutenant's fair brow, and he said:

"I am the victim of a cursed vice."

"How do you mean?" queried Jack, in surprise.

"I am a hopeless gambler."

"Indeed!"

"Many times I have hoarded enough money from my salary to have saved my parents long ago, but no sooner would I get the money together when the inordinate desire to play games of chance overwhelmed me. I weakly gave in to the demon. Invariably I lost all my money."

"And wasn't that lesson enough to you to stop?"

"Temporarily. As soon as the brunt of my misery wore off, I was a reckless, nay, mad enough to try and retrieve my losses by continuing to play. Ultimately I became penniless, and the dark cloud that overhung the fate of my poor old mother and father grew darker. Now, however, I mean to do my

duty by saving them and leaving cards alone. I will try hard to keep my resolution."

"You have my most earnest wishes that you may," said Jack, and shaking hands with the gallant young soldier, he parted with him.

Leaving Hardy's troops to get rid of the outlaws, Jack and his friends returned to Bear Gulch.

They spent the night there.

On the following morning they started for Deadwood to convict Keno Bob, and to attend to some business Jack had to transact.

The boy wanted to build a single track road from Camp Wright to the city for the accommodation of his mining business, and when they reached Deadwood he had the deers stored away.

His first care was to give an affidavit to the authorities to prosecute Keno Bob, and with this sworn testimony against him the bandit was ultimately tried and sentenced to a long term in prison.

Throughout the ensuing week the boy prosecuted his business, and putting up at a hotel with Tim and Fritz, they were highly edified to hear every one speaking of his exploits.

Nearly everybody in Deadwood came to know about the way in which he had brought about the destruction of Tom King's gang of bandits by the aid of the Avalanche.

He was quoted all over.

People who knew him by sight treated him with marked courtesy and pointed him out in the streets to others who were ignorant of who he was until finally hundreds knew him.

Invitations poured in to him by the score to attend receptions, parties, balls and dinners, and although the young inventor and his friends were lionized wonderfully, they seldom took advantage of all the fine offers extended to them.

Jack finally concluded his business in Deadwood.

It was on a Wednesday night.

On the following morning he intended to return to the mine with his friends, aboard of the Avalanche.

"I wonder what could have become of Tom King?" the boy muttered as he strolled into the hotel corridor, and glancing up at the time-piece on the wall, saw that it was ten o'clock.

It seemed likely to Jack that his enemy must know what fate had befallen his gang at Bear Gulch if he had remained in Dakota, for every one was talking about it.

The man was a blackleg, professionally.

Good society would not harbor him.

It was more than likely that he must be somewhere about his customary haunts, and it flashed across the boy's mind that as he was a great gambler, the likeliest place to find him would be in some saloon of games.

Deadwood was full of them.

"I have a great notion to take a look in at some of the dens of vice here. Who knows but I may stumble across the rascal," thought the boy. "I would consider my war against the bandits of the Black Hills incomplete if I were to return to civilization without avenging Dick Fleetwood by capturing his murderer."

He approached the hotel proprietor, with whom he was acquainted.

"Do you know where there are any gambling houses in Deadwood where Tom King used to frequent?" the boy asked him.

"Why, yes," replied the hotelkeeper. "He was the owner of the saloon on D— Street, called the Tiger, over which there are the most luxuriously appointed gambling rooms in the city."

"Could I gain admittance?"

"If I accompany you you can."

"Will you take me there?"

"Certainly. Do you want to buck the tiger?"

"No, I want to try and find King."

"Oh! But they say he has disappeared."

"Who runs the place?"

"A man he called his partner."

"Well, I want to go, anyway."

"Then come along."

And so saying the hotelkeeper led Jack out.

They passed along various streets, and finally came to a pause in front of a three-storied house and passed in the basement door.

On this floor were billiard-rooms thronged with players, and on the next a very handsome barroom filled with mirrors, cut-glass dazzling lights, and a large gathering of men of all types.

Ascending to the next floor they came to a door at the head of the stairs, at which the hotelkeeper knocked, and a negro opened it.

A short, whispered dialogue followed, and the hotelkeeper then turned to Jack and said, in low tones:

"You may go in."

"Are you going back?" asked the boy.

"Must, as I've got business to attend to."

The hotelkeeper nodded and ascended the stairs, and Jack passed into a gloomy hall and entered a dimly lit parlor, furnished magnificently, adjoining the gambling rooms.

At one end of it was a gilt-framed pier glass extending from the floor to the ceiling, in front of which the boy discerned the figure of a man kneeling.

He was pressing a revolver to his temple to commit suicide.

With a cry of alarm the boy sprang into the room.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "That's cowardly!"

The pistol dropped to the young man's side, and he turned his pale face and feverish eyes around toward the young inventor.

Jack saw the man's features distinctly reflected in the mirror.

"Lieutenant Hardy!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

He was in reality the gallant young army officer.

"Ah! It is Jack Wright!" he groaned, staggering to his feet.

"Rash man! Would you take your life?" cried the boy.

"Forgive me, Wright, I was desperate," hoarsely said the lieutenant.

"Over what?"

"I got that \$5,000 reward, and just lost it gambling."

A look of pity crossed Jack's face.

"You are a brave soldier but a weak citizen!" he exclaimed.

"Heap shame and abuse on me; I deserve it."

"I will," answered Jack. "You are a fool. A coward!"

"Sir!" cried Hardy, drawing himself up haughtily and flushing.

"There—I've revived you!" laughed Jack. "Be a man, Hardy!"

Tears gushed to the lieutenant's eyes.

"Wright, I have been cheated. It was an unfair game."

"Will you let me regain your money for you?"

"Would to God you could!"

"Then follow me into the gambling room, and show me who swindled you."

CHAPTER XXI.

GAMBLING FOR HIGH STAKES.

Hardy opened a door and passed into a large room blazing with lights and thronged with men.

There was handsome carpet on the floor, fine paintings hung on the frescoed walls, expensive statuary stood about on pedestals, and rich draperies covered the doors and windows.

There were a number of green baize-covered card tables, surrounded by players at one side, near the front a game of faro was in progress, at another side stood a well-patronized roulette table, and at the end of the room stood a glittering sideboard in charge of a negro.

Jack cast a critical glance around.

"This place was purchased with money stolen on the road by the highwayman who runs this dive," he muttered. "How many people he must have successfully robbed to buy all this elegance."

Hardy plucked him by the sleeve.

"Well?" queried the boy.

"There's the dealer who won my money, beside us."

"You are sure, then, that he cheated you?"

"Positive—the cards were marked."

Jack shot a keen glance at the man indicated, and saw that he was a clerical-looking person, with a sandy beard and mustache, very florid complexion, and had a piece of court-plaster on his nose.

He had sparkling black eyes, and a firm, steady hand.

"A cool, desperate character," the boy muttered, critically.

He strolled over to the table.

"Can I go in the game?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the dealer, nodding.

His voice was husky, as if he had a cold.

Jack took a vacant seat and Hardy sat down near him.

There were four other players at the table, and they were playing poker.

Jack drew a wad of fifty one hundred dollar bills from his pocket, and spent one of them in chips.

"Any limit to the game?" he asked.

"None!" laconically replied the dealer, shuffling the cards.

"Your ante."

"Then I will make the pot one hundred dollars to play."

The four other players were electrified as Jack shoved all his chips in the middle of the table, and the dealer gave a violent start.

Every one of the other players arose and went out of the game before it was opened, as they had no desire to risk such high stakes.

The dealer did not flinch, however.

He put up a similar amount in bank-notes and dealt the cards, Jack watching his dexterous movements keenly, and the game began.

Jack drew two cards and the dealer took three.

The game went on.

The unusually high stakes attracted every one in the room, and the boy began to bet a hundred dollars at a time, using bank-notes in place of chips, until there were five thousand dollars on the table, when he was called to show his hand.

He held a flush against his opponent's three aces, and took the stakes, amid a buzz of conversation of the onlookers. The dealer was seen to turn very pale.

Jack got Hardy to cash all the chips at once, and gave him the five thousand dollars with the remark:

"Here's what you lost."

A grateful look swept over the lieutenant's face.

Jack then shuffled and dealt the cards as coolly as an iceberg, and began the second game, which opened with one hundred dollars.

The pot got up to a thousand dollars, when the gambler won. He dealt the third hand.

This time the stakes ran highest, for there were twenty one-hundred-dollar bills on the table.

Both Jack and his opponent seemed to have great faith in the hands they held, and the betting kept on.

Presently there were ten thousand dollars on the table in bills. The silence was intense.

Every one was so anxious and excited that they fairly held their breath.

Jack kept his hand covered and retained a steady glance upon the pale gambler, who was fumbling with his cards.

The dealer called Jack.

Every one expected the boy to glance at his own hand and throw it down; at least the boy's opponent did, for he very adroitly discarded, slipping the pasteboard up his sleeve, withdrawing a hidden card at the same time from the same place, and filling his hand with it.

But swift and facile as his manœuvre had been, he could not deceive the eye of the young inventor.

"Swindler!" the boy exclaimed.

"Oh!" gasped the man.

Click! sounded a revolver, and the next instant the boy had his weapon aimed point blank between the gambler's eyes. Every one recoiled.

Jack held up his hand with his unoccupied fingers.

"Can you beat that?" he cried.

"A royal flush!" exclaimed Hardy. "All diamonds!"

"So is mine in spades!" said the gambler, sullenly, as he showed it.

"You have cheated!" said Jack, vehemently.

"You lie!" hissed the other, malevolently.

"Hardy!"

"Yes."

"Pocket the stakes for me."

"Hold on!" sternly cried an employe of the place.

"Not much!" said Hardy, seizing the money and drawing his pistol with a determined air. "The first man who tries to get this money away from me will fall dead in his tracks!"

"Fair play!" said some one.

"You'll get it, gentlemen," quietly answered Jack.

"How?" chorused several.

"Open that man's clothes, you will find a card hidden up his sleeve which he abstracted from his hand. He did not hold a royal flush. He had all of the requisite cards but one. That card he filled from under his clothing. See if I ain't right?"

One of the spectators held up the gambler's sleeve.

The ace of hearts fluttered out to the floor, convincing all hands that Jack had told the truth, and they next saw that the gambler had duplicate cards all over the lining of his clothes.

He knew where each kind was located, and by his subtle sleight-of-hand, easily filled whenever he chose to.

It was manifest that he was a cheat, who had duped every gambler in the room at one time or another.

Of all the 2,366 people in Deadwood City, the habitudes of this den were perhaps the worst; yet when the flagrant dishonesty of this gambler became apparent, they all became indignant, for the very reason that he had at one time or another cheated them, too.

"Gentlemen," said Jack, "are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly," assented several.

Hardy handed Jack the money and he put it in his pocket.

The boy then said:

"I've got a surprise for you all. This man is a masquerader."

He isn't the person he seems to be. See here!"

And so saying the boy seized the gambler's beard and pulled off.

It was false, of course, and every one was intensely amazed as they stared at the smoothed-faced individual who now looked so different.

"Why," exclaimed Jack, in startled amazement, "it is Tom King himself!"

Had a bomb bursted among the gamblers they could not

have been more amazed, for although the bandit had shaved off his dark, curling mustache and dyed his hair, they now recognized him.

Taking advantage of their shock of surprise, as quick as a flash King opened a panel in the wall in back of him, sprang through the aperture and before Jack could do anything, he vanished in a secret passage between the walls.

CHAPTER XXII.

FINIS.

"He has escaped!"

"Head him off!"

"Catch the cheat!"

"Break in the panel!"

"Follow him!"

These cries and many more succeeded Tom King's escape from the room, and Jack and Hardy tried to burst the panel open, but as it was made of durable planks, they failed to break it.

"I'll leave you to hunt him down, Hardy," said Jack.

"God bless you, Wright!" said the young soldier. "I'll leave cards alone."

They clasped hands and parted forever.

Jack hastened out to the street, and went hunting around for some trace of the fugitive but failed to find him.

He had made good his escape.

Finding how utterly useless it was to look any further, Jack gave up the search at last and returned to the Avalanche, where he found Tim and Fritz by appointment, wild with impatience for him to come and engaged in a wrangle over the fighting merits of Whiskers and Bismarck.

"Keel haul me now!" roared the old sailor, sighting Jack. "Here he is now!"

"Shiminey Christmas!" replied the Dutch boy, "it vhas dime."

"What ails you both?" queried the boy.

"We seed King awhile ago," replied Tim, excitedly.

"You did? Where?" eagerly asked Jack.

"Mounted on a fine, black horse, a-riding out o' ther city."

"Ha! Do you know what direction he followed?"

"Ay, lad, due south'ard."

"Then let us follow him at once!"

The boy started the deers off and once out on the rolling plains in the bright moonlight, he explained to his friends what had happened at the gambling saloon.

Fritz and Tim were amazed.

"This trip to the southward," said the boy, "is like hunting for a needle in a haystack. But, it is my opinion, that the fugitive is heading for Pluma or Kirk, in order to get out of Dakota by rail. At any rate, I'll risk trying the experiment of looking for him there."

The deers followed the regular wagon road near the railroad track, and three miles from Deadwood went into a forest.

It was a dark, gloomy path, and they had not followed it far when Jack suddenly heard the pounding of a horse's hoofs ahead.

He turned the searchlight in that direction, and it showed him the very man he was looking for, riding like the wind.

The big black horse he bestrode became frightened when it saw the electric light and blue sparks flashing from the electric deers, and began to balk and kick.

Tom King made a desperate effort to control the fiery beast, but it suddenly sprang away and spilled him from the saddle, his foot catching in the stirrup.

A yell of horror pealed from the bandit chief.

He was dragged along by the flying beast, his head and body dragging along the ground after it.

Away it dashed, and passing through the woods, it rushed out on the plain again, and pursued by the Avalanche, which kept it in a state of terror, it fled on at the top of its speed.

The outlaw was torn, bruised, battered and cut, by being dragged over the ground, the cruel rocks beating him till his yellows turned into hoarse moans, and his moans into silence.

A mile or more he was dragged along in this manner, and his foot finally becoming dislodged from the stirrup, he lay prostrate and the beast ran on without him.

Jack steered the Avalanche up to his body and alighted.

The boy cast a glance down at the battered-in head, and turned away with a violent shudder to his friends.

"He is dead!" said the boy.

And the young inventor was not mistaken.

They left the body where it was, and steered the electric deers for Bear Gulch, from whence they proceeded to Camp Wright.

Here they arrived in due time, and met Hopkins.

He had some news for them.

A syndicate of capitalists were at the camp who wanted to buy the Lost Gold Mine at a high figure.

On the following day Jack met the gentlemen, and struck a bargain with them by selling the mine.

"We have no call to remain here any longer," the boy told his friends. "We have sold our interest and rid the Black Hills of the worst gang of bandits who ever infested it. Let us go home."

The rest eagerly assented to this proposition.

So they went to Deadwood, took the Avalanche apart, and packing it up, they shipped it for Wrightstown.

The quartette went in the same train, Hopkins swearing all

the way home that he had enough of wild adventure, and that he would never venture another trip with Jack.

In due time they reached the village, and here the proceeds of the sale of the mine were divided with Mrs. Fleetwood.

They did not expose her husband's villainous treachery to her.

Each one of the four friends were handsomely paid for what they had done, and armed with numerous specimens of fossils, Peleg Hopkins took leave of the trio and returned to New York.

Jack, Tim and Fritz, with Bismarck and Whiskers, settled down to their regular way of living again, and enjoyed the result of their hazardous trip.

While Jack was away he had conceived a newer and stranger invention than any he invented before, and as soon as he had plenty of leisure, he began to build it.

For want of space, however, we must leave the three friends, busy on the new contrivance for the present. But in another book we hope soon to show you what the boy inventor devised, and what he and his friends did with it.

[THE END.]

Read "12 O'CLOCK; OR, THE MYSTERY OF THE LIGHT-HOUSE," a story of the Revolution, by Gen. Jas. A. Gordon, which will be the next number (223) of "Pluck and Luck."

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